Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures 3

Thomas B. Ellis

# On the Death of the Pilgrim: The Postcolonial Hermeneutics of Jarava Lal Mehta

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# Preface

This project began in the late 1990s while I was a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania. At that time, I was studying Sanskrit and Indian philosophy with the late, and I would want to add immediately, “great,” Wilhelm Halbfass. Under Halbfass’s watchful eye, I, and my graduate student colleagues, read the original texts of some of India’s greatest philosophical voices. What struck me then, however, and continues to strike me now, is that many Western students interested in Indian philosophy find motivation in a desire to understand the so-called “classical” schools or *darśanas*. This is, in itself, not necessarily problematic. Indeed, we have many fine scholarly products today that exhaustively detail what one particular school or thinker has proposed. These are generally the products of descriptive Indology. Of course, these projects occasionally, if not routinely appear a bit apologetic and, from one particular philosophical perspective, antiquated. This is not the place to take up such a polemic. What I do want to draw attention to is the so-called comparative project. Comparative projects interested me then and interest me now. Indeed, I am interested in the fruitful exchange between intellectual traditions originating in geographically distinct spaces. As it is with descriptive Indological products, we have at our disposal today many books and articles that juxtapose fruitfully a classical Indian school with a modern Western thinker. This is all fine and good until we realize that such a project potentially perpetuates a subtle Orientalism. It is as if the only Indian thinkers worthy of Western, scholarly attention are from a distant past. This, in itself, betrays a Hegelian sense of the march of reason. Projects devoted to classical Indian thinkers either alone or in comparison with *modern* Western thinkers may encourage readers to believe that the heyday of Indian intellectual life has passed. This could not be further from the truth.

This book assesses the contributions of a twentieth century Hindu intellectual to the global, philosophical conversation currently under way. Hindu intellectual life, to be sure, did not stagnate with the work of the great Śaṅkara or Abhinavagupta. In fact, I argue that such thinkers are not prepared to handle the developments in philosophy and theory as they have unfolded in the so-called West during and after the Enlightenment. The relevance of Indian intellectual traditions must be sought and found in contemporary voices, not in classical ones. In this regard, I hope to

show that Jarava Lal Mehta is one Hindu intellectual worthy of our sustained attention and engagement. You, the reader, will have to be the judge as to the success or failure of such a project.

Many mentors, colleagues, and friends have contributed to the eventual production of this manuscript. While a list of such contributors exceeds what I can add here, there are a few individuals who deserve explicit recognition. First, I would like to acknowledge, once again, my mentor, Wilhelm Halbfass. He surely understood my frustration with studying only classical Indian systems, and as such encouraged me to undertake a project on J.L. Mehta. I regret to say that Professor Halbfass passed away prior to the completion of the dissertation manuscript. I can only hope that he would have approved of my presentation. In Halbfass's absence, Stephen Dunning (University of Pennsylvania) and Fred Dallmayr (University of Notre Dame) took up the chore of seeing the manuscript to completion. I thank them for their guidance throughout. I would also like to acknowledge two of my graduate colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania: Jason D. Fuller and Tirdad Derakhshani. These two gentlemen showed me, each in their own way, that I had and still have plenty of homework to do. I would like to thank Purushottama Bilimoria for his insistence that I see this project to publication; without his assistance, I may have just let this one rest on the corner of my desk. I also want to thank Anita Fei van der Linden at Springer for her guidance through the publication process; editors have quite the arduous task. A note of gratitude is certainly due to the two reviewers of the initial drafts. Their encouragement was most appreciated; and, as usual, where the manuscript still comes up a bit short, I take full responsibility. I also want to thank Veena and Vikram Mandloi and Vimila Mehta for graciously hosting me in Japabalpur, Madhya Pradesh. I regret that Mrs. Mehta also passed away before this volume was produced.

Finally, there are three individuals that I want to single out especially. While Professor Halbfass mentored me through most of my graduate training, my undergraduate mentor and now friend, Hal French (University of South Carolina), deserves credit for helping me find my professional path. As an undergraduate flailing about, trying to find a major, it was Hal's course on comparative religion that initially propelled me towards Indian studies. Lastly, I want to thank my wife, Megan Lynch Ellis, and my daughter, Madelyn Davies Ellis. These two women have put up with my academic commitments for quite some time; their sustained encouragement and support continues to amaze me. Thank you, one and all.

Boone, North Carolina Thomas B. Ellis

# Contents

# Abbreviations of Cited Work

Below I provide a list of abbreviations for those works most often cited throughout the project. The first two sets are lists of abbreviations pertaining to Mehta's published and unpublished works. Though his international reputation was established with the publication of *The Philosophy of Martin Heidegger*, Mehta's other published writings consist of essays that are now available through several different sources. Accordingly, I list first the books and collections of essays with their own abbreviations. I next list the abbreviations for each essay in alphabetical order along with the date it was originally written, as well as the abbreviation of the source from which it was taken. I have also provided notes addressing multiple publications. Finally, I provide abbreviations for two other sources that figure prominently in this project, namely, Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*.

## Mehta's Books and Collections of Essays

| | |
|---|---|
| IW | *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding*. 1985. Chico: Scholar's Press. |
| JLM | *J. L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, W. J. Jackson (ed.). 1992. Leiden: E. J. Brill. |
| LRO | *Language and Reality and Other Papers*, ed. J. L. Mehta. 1968. Varanasi: Centre for the Advanced Study in Philosophy – Banaras Hindu University. |
| PMH | *The Philosophy of Martin Heidegger*. 1967. Varanasi: Banaras Hindu University Press. (Also published as, *Martin Heidegger: The Way and the Vision*. 1976. Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press.) |
| PR | *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation*. 1990. New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research. |

## Mehta's Individual Essays

| | |
|---|---|
| B | "*Bhakti* in Philosophical Perspective" (1986) PR |
| BBK | "Beyond Believing and Knowing" (1976) IW |
| BNB | "Being and Non-Being" (1968) IW |
| CP | "Concept of Progress" (1967) IW |
| CS | "Concept of the Subjective" (1966) IW |
| DR | "Dr. Radhakrishnan's Eastern Religions and Western Thought Review" (1967) unpublished |
| DV | "Discourse of Violence in the *Mahabharata*" (1987) PR |
| E | "Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre" (1966) IW |
| ET | "Existential Themes and Indian Thought" (1965) unpublished |
| FH | "Finding Heidegger" (1977) JLM[1] |
| HCIW | "Heidegger and the Comparison of Indian and Western Philosophy" (1970) PR |
| HD | "Heidegger's Debts" (1967) JLM |
| HT | "The Hindu Tradition: The Vedic Root" (1982)[2] JLM |
| HV | "Heidegger and Vedanta: Reflections on a Questionable Theme" (1978)[3] IW |
| IM | "In Memoriam: Martin Heidegger" (1977) PR |
| K | "Krishna: God as Friend" (1988) JLM |
| KD | "Krishna Dvaipayana: Poet of Being and Becoming" (1987) PR |
| LLY | "Sri Aurodindo: Life, Language and Yoga" (1983) PR |
| LR | "Language and Reality" (1968) LRO |
| LW | "Life-Worlds, Sacrality and Interpretive Thinking" (1987)[4] JLM |
| MM | "The Meaning of Metaphysics" (1965) unpublished |
| MT | "Modernity and Tradition" (1986) PR |
| MY | "My Years at the Center for the Study of World Religions: Some Reflections" (1979) PR |
| NPM | "The Nature of the Phenomenological Method" (1987) JLM |
| P | "Postlude" (collected in 1992) JLM |
| PIU | "Problems of Inter-cultural Understanding in University Studies of Religion" (1968) IW |
| PNE | "Philosophical Necessity of Existentialism" (1966) IW |
| PP | "Postmodern Problems East/West: Reflections and Exchanges" (collected in 1992) JLM |
| PPE | "Philosophy, Philology and Empirical Knowledge" (1982) PR |

[1] Also found in *Philosophy and Religion*.

[2] Also found in *Philosophy and Religion*.

[3] This essay has also been published in G. Parkes, ed., *Heidegger and Asian Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987).

[4] This essay has also been published in T. S. Rukmani, ed., *Religious Consciousness and Life-worlds* (Delhi: Indian Institute of Advanced Study and Indus Publishers, 1988). It also appears in the collection *Philosophy and Religion*.

PPR "The Problem of Philosophical Reconception in the Thought of K.C. Bhattacharyya" (1974) IW
PU "Problems of Understanding" (1988) JLM
RV "The *Rigveda*: Text and Interpretation" (1988)[5] PR
SA "A Stranger from Asia" (1977) PR
SCW "Science, Conversation and Wholeness" (1984) PR
SL "Saving Leap" (1967)[6] JLM
TP "Transformation of Phenomenology" (1987) JLM
TRV "T. R. V. Murti: A Philosophical Tribute" (1986) unpublished
UT "Understanding and Tradition" (1969)[7] IW
WC "'World Civilization': The Possibility of Dialogue" (1977) JLM
WI "The Will to Interpret and India's Dreaming Spirit" (1974)[8] JLM

## Other Cited Works

BT Heidegger, Martin. 1988. *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
TM Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1989. *Truth and Method* (2nd Rev. Ed.), trans. J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall. New York: Continuum.

[5] This essay has also been published in Chattopahyaya, Embree, and Mohanty , eds., *Phenomenology and Indian Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992) as "Reading the Rigveda: A Phenomenological Essay".

[6] This is also the concluding section of *The Philosophy of Martin Heidegger*.

[7] Also found in *J. L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*.

[8] Also found in *India and the West.*

# Chapter 1
# Introduction

Apocalypticism characterizes the recent history of the human sciences (cf. Derrida 1984; Lyotard 1984). The widespread, not to mention fashionable, use of the term "post" as a qualifying coefficient for a whole host of theoretical and disciplinary strategies bears this out. From post-Cold War to post-structuralism, the impression lingers that we are witnessing the demise of certain ways of conceptualizing reality. Politically speaking, such apocalypticism is reflected, of course, in the widespread use of "postcolonial," a moniker for those efforts at rendering transparent the means by which foreign bodies not only have but in certain areas continue to occupy. Postcolonial studies interrogate empire. Though generally perceived to manifest in overt military and administrative occupation, empire's subtle influence on academic disciplines rightly commands our critical attention as well. The disciplines of representation (e.g., anthropology, Indology, history) have particularly been accused of reproducing discourses of power through which the non-Western other becomes a domesticated object for an imperial gaze (Breckenridge and van der Veer 1993: 1). High modernity labored under the illusion of exhaustive transparency, denying thereby the possibility of alterity. Despite current discourse about "post-this" and "post-that," many remain unconvinced that the dissymmetry at the historical heart of cross-cultural encounter has been corrected. Subterranean residues of the colonial experience linger (Halbfass 1988: 440). True, overt colonial rule maintains itself in only a few places in the world of the early twenty-first century. That being said, there is, to be sure, a determined concern regarding a more pernicious, because often largely undetected, form of colonialism. Perhaps we are just now coming to grips with the true reach and scope of empire. Successful nationalist projects, to be sure, do not necessarily entail emancipation from *ontological* shackles.

In 1929, the Hindu philosopher Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya pointed to the need for a Hindu "Swaraj in Ideas," that is, a "Self-determination in Ideas" (Bhattacharyya 1954 [1929]). Bhattacharyya admonished his fellow Hindu intellectuals to retrieve their own voices, voices in the past too readily compliant with external and hence imported styles of critique and interpretation. Often uncritically adopting European philosophy as the yardstick by which to measure progress or

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retardation, Hindu intellectuals precipitately compromised their own traditions of philosophical and religious thought. For Bhattacharyya, this betrayed a much more disquieting form of colonial rule than that of overt "political subjection":

> There is… a subtler domination exercised in the sphere of ideas by one culture on another, a domination all the more serious in the consequence, because it is not ordinarily felt…. Cultural subjection is ordinarily of an unconscious character and it implies slavery from the very start…. There is cultural subjection… when one's traditional cast of ideas and sentiments is superseded without comparison or competition by a new cast representing an alien culture which possesses one like a ghost. (1954 [1929]: 105)

It is precisely the twentieth century Hindu intellectual, according to Bhattacharyya, whom the ghost of the colonial master continues to haunt. For this reason, Bhattacharyya called for an intellectual exorcism: the Hindu intellectual was to reclaim his "vernacular mind" (Bhattacharyya 1954 [1929]: 105).

Many Hindu intellectuals have in fact taken up just such a project. To be sure, popular perceptions of twentieth century Indian philosophy are quick to identify the likes of Gandhi, Vivekananda, Radhakrishnan, and Aurobindo. Although recognizing the accomplishments of such noted authors and activists, I believe popular fascination with these men often draws attention away from other authors whose work forwards even more so the emancipatory agenda Bhattacharyya encourages. I believe one such author is Jarava Lal Mehta (1912–1988). Although heretofore largely unrecognized and thus underappreciated, Mehta presents not only a subtle and sophisticated but also, and importantly, novel hermeneutic theory. I argue that Mehta's *postcolonial* hermeneutics offers a model of both cross-cultural encounter as well as transcendental subjectivity that ethically succeed precisely where German phenomenology and Franco-American deconstruction fail. Mehta's postcolonial hermeneutics finishes the meta-ethical criticism of phenomenology's transcendental egology, a project deconstruction inaugurated yet failed to see to completion.

In *An Introduction to Hinduism*, Gavin Flood (1996) explicitly recognizes two twentieth century Indian philosophers who, in direct contrast to their many peers involved with Anglo-Austrian analytic philosophy, were wedded to European phenomenology and existentialism respectively: K. C. Bhattacharyya and J. L. Mehta (Flood 1996: 248). This is, I believe, a rather significant departure from the majority. While mainstream philosophy at Cambridge and Oxford pursued positivism and philosophy of language, the Continental tradition of philosophy addressed phenomenology and existence in the life-world. Following Nietzsche's (in)famous pronouncement of the "death of God," German and French philosophy each in their own way pursued criticisms of metaphysical claims to transcultural and transtemporal truths, putatively disclosing thereby the hidden presuppositions of Western thought, the very presuppositions that stained the furniture of empire. While Bhattacharyya worked on a critique of Hegel and Kant from renewed positions within India's classical *darśanas*, that is, schools of philosophy, Mehta eventually immersed himself in Heideggerian and post-Heideggerian philosophy, and in particular, the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer (not to mention a certain interest in Jacques Derrida). In a time of many posts (e.g., post-Cold War, post-Marxism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, post-Enlightenment, post-metaphysics, post-Orientalism, post-feminism),

Mehta reads these posts as signs guiding his pilgrimage. As signposts, Heideggerian and post-Heideggerian thought are ultimately way markers, points that one must pass by and/or through on the way to one's destination. Mehta indeed garners from the Heideggerian tradition (including its Derridean offshoot) particular lessons that he applies to his readings of the cross-cultural encounter and the Hindu tradition. Mehta's "swaraj in ideas" in this way means not the facile turning away from the prejudices of the European metaphysical tradition, but rather a patient yet agonal hermeneutic encounter. Western metaphysics, so-called, is not something Hindu intellectuals can merely discard at will. Precisely to these ends, Mehta finds in Heidegger the appropriate dialogue partner in this age of "world civilization," in this age of posts. Significantly, though, where Heidegger articulated a philosophy apparently amenable to an imperial conquest, Mehta finds the resources necessary for the precise opposite, that is, an antidote to the "clash of civilizations" (Huntington 1996).

Despite its historical ties to fascism, Heidegger's work, according to Mehta's interpretation, opens the space for the deconstruction of the philosophical presumptions and prejudices of empire, particularly the presumption that alterity is reducible to identity. Like Bhattacharyya, Mehta sensed an urgent need to delimit ontologically the universal claims of Western metaphysics and technology. For Mehta, contesting political authority and the redistribution of resources was simply insufficient for true liberation; after all, "the practice of imperialism is not limited to the conquest of extraterritorial peoples and their spaces…. The imperial *actio* proper is… a meta-physically or panoptically enabled act of circumspection, cultivation, and colonization that sometimes unevenly traverses the indissoluble lateral continuum of being" (Spanos 1996: 157). It is precisely postcolonial studies' general disregard of empire's ontology that requires an extension of critical effort. The tradition of Western metaphysics enables the transcendental subjectivity resting at the base of colonial expansion. As will become clear in the chapters that follow, the fundamental egology of transcendental subjectivity constitutes not only the philosophical disposition but also the ostensibly warranted expansion of Western culture (Levinas 1986). Accordingly, freedom from colonial rule necessitates an ontological critique often found lacking in the routine, postcolonial emphasis on material history and literature. Commenting on the work of the literary theorist Edward Said, W. V. Spanos rightly notes in this regard (worth citing at length):

> Said fails to adequately articulate the absolute continuity – however uneven in any *particular* historical occasion, including the present – between *ontological representation* (metaphysics: the perception and ordering of the *being* of Being, the differences that temporality always already disseminates, from above or after the process), *cultural production* (the re-presentation of individual and social experience *as* narrative), and imperialism (the "conquest" and incorporation of extra-territorial constituencies – the provincial "others" – within the self-identical framework of the "conquering" metropolis)…. Knowledge production – more specifically, the Occidental interpretation of being – informs, and is informed by, an imperial will to power. Any failure to recognize this 'ontological imperialism' renders postcolonial discourse and practice inadequate to its emancipatory task. (1996: 140–141)

I intend to demonstrate that Mehta's postcolonial hermeneutics troubles precisely such ontological imperialism. Insofar as ontological imperialism is the ontology of empire, then Mehta's hermeneutics is rightly considered "postcolonial." Though often

unrecognized, ontological imperialism finds expression in Gadamer's *philosophical* hermeneutics. It is only through a deconstruction of philosophical hermeneutics' ontological imperialism that the haunted mind of the Indian intellectual can begin to break free of his or her tutelage to the Western horizon. In this regard, the apocalyptic land of posts indicates a certain land of births as well. For Mehta, Heidegger's "hermeneutics of facticity" in particular announces a welcomed return to the structures of everyday life and concerns, a turn that challenges the dominant calculative and representative modes of discourse latent in the transcendental subject's objectifying gaze. Granted, it is this turn to and eventual celebration of the local that led the way to Heidegger's involvement in fascist politics. For those in the non-Western world, however, it led to the opportunity to develop anew their own discursive spaces wherein the confluence of European thought and traditional, indigenous thought may wrestle with each other.[1]

By this point, I imagine that the alert reader will have realized that this book is not another ethnographic project detailing an empirical, Hindu pilgrimage. Rather, this is a project on cross-cultural hermeneutics and, *faute de mieux*, comparative philosophy of religion.[2] It is also a work in contemporary Hindu religio-philosophical thought. Among the many scholars associated with this field, and here I think of Gerald Larson, Raimundo Panikkar, Jitendra Nath Mohanty, Daya Krishna, Purushottama Bilimoria, Eliot Deutsch, and Wilhelm Halbfass (to name but a few), this project demonstrates not only the relevance but also the unique contribution of Mehta's work to this rather young "discipline." Throughout the chapters that follow, I detail for the first time the life and work of one of India's most important – though little known – twentieth century intellectuals. I will specifically identify Mehta's "pilgrim" as his particular – what I call – "ethnotrope." This ethnotrope represents Mehta's philosophy of transcendental subjectivity, a novel contribution to a discussion currently taking place between Husserlian phenomenology and Derridean deconstruction. By bringing Mehta's work to bear on these issues, I hope not only to broaden our understanding of contemporary, Hindu intellectual life, but also follow Mehta's lead on his journey to a more just world.

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[1] Attempts at truly equitable comparisons/dialogues between Western, especially Continental, and non-Western philosophies certainly abound in today's academic culture. Consider, for example, Serequeberhan (1994), Li (1999), Bongmba (2000), and Zhang (2006); for a review of the latter, see Ellis (2008b).

[2] To the extent that this is a project in hermeneutics and comparative philosophy of religion, certain Western names intimately tied to such topics will recur throughout, most notably: Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida, Emanuel Levinas, John D. Caputo, and Mark C. Taylor. While Mehta speaks specifically of only Heidegger, Gadamer, Derrida, and Caputo, I nevertheless feel that Levinas and Taylor discuss themes that so closely resonate with Mehta's that they occasionally serve for exposition as well as illustrative contrast. In general, I believe these figures (save Heidegger of course) to be not only post-Heideggerian thinkers like Mehta, but they are also most representative of late twentieth century Continental philosophy of religion, and in this regard they are the implicit dialogue partners for many of Mehta's reflections on comparative philosophy and religion.

The task at hand, I realize, is to a certain extent formidable: the overwhelming majority of Mehta's extant work consists of occasional essays. In this regard (and as is perhaps the case with many scholars), the themes Mehta addresses are often consonant with general themes of larger panels, symposia, and conferences to which he was invited, thus conceivably appearing rather accidental.[3] For instance, some of Mehta's most important remarks concerning "pilgrimage" come from a paper delivered at a conference with "pilgrimage" as an explicit topic. This raises the rather pertinent question: Did Mehta entertain the ideas he entertained at the behest of another? Perhaps. However, I would not want to suggest that Mehta was merely a reactionary thinker, that is, that Mehta addressed certain themes due only to the prompting of another (although such promptings curiously play a certain role in his larger hermeneutic theory). Rather, I intend to show that, regardless of contextual disparity, Mehta's occasional essays reveal consistent and recurring concerns throughout his scholarly career. For this reason, I will treat Mehta's collected works as an internally coherent whole, a whole of which (I will admit) even Mehta may have been unaware. Allowing earlier pieces to inform the themes of later pieces and vice-versa, I employ a hermeneutic method in which the parts illuminate the whole and the whole illuminates the parts.

Outside of prefaces and introductions to collections of Mehta's work, there is conspicuously only one secondary essay available in print that can contribute to this project: Fred Dallmayr (1996) published an essay entitled, "Heidegger, Bhakti, and Vedanta: A Tribute to J. L. Mehta."[4] I believe we can discern at least two possible reasons for this dearth: Mehta is interested neither in class nor in mysticism and meditation.[5] Circumventing popular tendencies to privilege either the voices and politics of the materially oppressed, that is, the subaltern, or the exotic and colorful guru, this project traces the sober and penetrating voice of a sophisticated Hindu intellectual precariously balanced between twentieth century Continental philosophy and classical forms of Hinduism. Mehta, I propose, stands alone in his cross-cultural hermeneutic vigilance. Desiring not a nostalgic, and thus facile, return to a wonder that was India, Mehta recognizes that a pure Hindu horizon is irretrievable. Nevertheless, this does not entail the abandonment of that tradition. Mehta does not acquiesce to the "blackmail of the Enlightenment," that is, the simple opposition

[3] I want to thank John B. Carman for drawing my attention to this rather pertinent concern.

[4] Here I am discounting my own contributions; see Ellis (2008a, 2010).

[5] In this regard, we read the following from Mehta: "Whatever a sociologically oriented study of the epic [i.e., the *Mahābhārata*] may have to say on this, a reader who takes it as poetry or as an imaginative verbal structure encompassing a total vision of human life in its necessity, actuality and possibility, should not find it difficult to penetrate beneath all caste-talk to the deeper meaning underlying it" (DV 259). Mehta also sides with Heidegger's assessment of mysticism: "As he [i.e., Heidegger] points out… the notion of mysticism in the sense of an irrationalistic *Erleben* (immediate inner experience) rests on an extreme rationalization of philosophy…. Almost a quarter of a century later, Heidegger makes the same point when he asserts that mysticism is the mere counterpart of metaphysics, into which people take flight when, still wholly caught in their slavery to metaphysical thinking, they are struck by the hiddenness in all revealment and lapse into unthinking helplessness" (HV 251).

between full rationalism and full anti-rationalism (Dallmayr 1998: 2). What then is Mehta's relationship to the "Enlightened West" as well as to the putatively un-enlightened East? And, moreover, what can we garner for our present predicament from Mehta's own footsteps, his own trace? This project attempts to answer these questions.

In the chapters that follow, I analyze Mehta's interpretive strategy through his various works on Continental philosophy, comparative philosophy and religion, and the Hindu tradition in this contemporary epoch of posts. For this reason, it will be necessary to bear in mind that Mehta's reading of, for example, Hindu *bhakti* reflects not a traditional interpretation but one that consciously incorporates, among other things, the lessons of Heidegger's ontological difference as well as Derrida's work on the "trace." Precisely in this way, Mehta's reading of the Hindu tradition reflects the work of an author who, perhaps at the expense of more classical understandings of the Hindu tradition, takes seriously the developments in Continental philosophy. Among many to be sure, Mehta is certainly one significant voice capable of speaking for Hinduism *today*.[6]

In order to do justice to Mehta's life and career, I propose to undertake not only a detailed analysis of his extant writings on philosophy and religion but his biography as well. I thus begin with his personal pilgrimage. In Chap. 2, I chronicle Mehta's life from his early childhood days on the banks of the river Ganga to his years at Banaras Hindu University, his tenure at Harvard University, and finally to his quiet retirement in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh. I specifically address not only dates and places along his journey but also the various sea changes he undergoes throughout. For instance, I locate early in Mehta's life a certain proclivity towards detection. First introduced to Western literature through the works of Sir Arthur Conan O'Doyle and Edgar Allen Poe, Mehta found fascinating those works that dealt with detecting the latent and thus opaque nature of the other. To this extent, Mehta evinced an early desire to unmask the other, and in particular, the Western other. Eventually he believed he could do this through a thorough examination of Western philosophy. Mehta thought that if philosophy reflects its time and peoples in thought, then a thorough examination of the other's philosophy would yield the other transparent. This, however, remained not the case. Late in his career, Mehta reevaluated the motivation for unmasking the other. In fact, during the 1970s, Mehta seemingly relinquished this propensity for detection. While at Harvard University's Center for the Study of the World's Religions, Mehta rethought the philosopher's penchant for reducing alterity.

Significantly, though, this is not the end of the story. In the 1980s, Mehta returned to his own tradition in order to tease out its contributions to a post-Enlightenment audience both East and West. Mehta's late writings demonstrate a mature mind coming home to the treasures of an almost forgotten past. Yet he did not return to rejuvenate a "pristine" Hinduism. Mehta afforded his studies in Western thought

[6] Here I am referring in particular to the series of articles under the heading "Who Speaks for Hinduism?" in a 2000 publication of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68(4).

their influential moment. To this extent, Mehta's re-reading of the Hindu tradition thrusts such texts as the *Ṛgveda*, the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* into the age of postmodernity. The Hindu tradition for Mehta had/has significant lessons to learn from the West as well as to impart to the sojourner wearied of facile acceptances/rejections of both the modern West and the "pre-modern" East. Mehta's pilgrimage thus ends with a revivification and reclamation of India's religious traditions in light of current developments in postmetaphysical thought.

Following this biographical introduction, I organize the next three chapters according to Mehta's chronological as well as logical trajectory. That is to say, Chap. 3, addresses Mehta's work in the 1950s and 1960s. During the two decades immediately following the withdrawal of overt colonial rule from India, Mehta trained his eye primarily on the work of Martin Heidegger, while also working closely with Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Both Heidegger and Gadamer provide for Mehta insights into the deep presuppositions of the Western philosophical tradition, the very same tradition that conceptually facilitated the colonization of India (not to mention other European conquests). Accordingly, in Chap. 3 I address Heidegger's "hermeneutics of facticity," as well as his late work on the "ontological difference" and poets and poetry; I also detail Gadamer's theories of prejudice, provocation, and "fusion of horizons." I show that Mehta finds in Heidegger's and Gadamer's deconstruction of Western metaphysics not only the lens by which to render the opaque West transparent, but also and simultaneously the conceptual means necessary for exorcising Bhattacharyya's haunted Indian. Mehta writes,

> But in one respect at least this hermeneutical mode of thinking, based on Heidegger's critique of the traditional Western notions of Time, Being, Truth, and Man, seems to be immediately helpful. It promises a new sort of freedom and renewed hope to the Indian thinker reflecting on, and out of, his own tradition. (WI 179)[7]

In Chap. 4, I turn to Mehta's writings in the 1970s (and to some extent the 1980s as well). During the 1970s, Mehta conspicuously takes up the topic of comparative studies. Unlike his earlier writings on the Continental tradition as such, Mehta

[7] By no means is Mehta alone in this appreciation of the Continental tradition and its role in cross-cultural dialogue. Mark C. Taylor also notices a certain emancipatory value latent in Heideggerian and post-Heideggerian philosophy: "Beyond, or even 'within,' the closure of the western ontotheological tradition there might lie an opening to and of the East" (1986a: 549). Taylor also notes that "the distinguished Japanese scholar Toshihiko Izutsu has shown considerable interest in approaching oriental philosophy from the perspective opened by post-Heideggerian thinking" (1986b: 163). By means of Heidegger's "hermeneutics of facticity" and Gadamer's "philosophical hermeneutics," Mehta, much like Taylor and Izutsu here, finds the necessary foundation upon which to critique the cross-cultural encounter and its proclivity towards comparative philosophy and comparative philosophy of religion, that is, towards the universalizing *philosophia perennis*. For Mehta, "perennial philosophy" (East and West) betrays a colonizing predilection: perennial philosophy aggressively presumes a metaphysical identity hiding behind disparate cultural idioms. Comparative philosophy, generally speaking, distills cultural singularity in the name of an overarching commonality, a topic dealt with at length in Chap. 4.

now critiques the comparative enterprise. He starts to ask questions concerning the accessibility of the other's traditions. In particular, Mehta addresses issues of power in the cross-cultural encounter, arguing that there are ultimately two modes of understanding the other. One mode seeks to domesticate the other, to dominate the other while assuming the superiority of its own position. Here understanding is understood as a "will-to-power." The other mode goes out to the other in an engaged relation, allowing the other to challenge, surprise, and thwart. Here understanding is not so much an operation performed on the other as it is a self-understanding that suffers the other's alterity. Significantly, Mehta often associates the former model with science and technology and the latter with religion. Contesting the philosophical spirit of science's disengaged spectator, the interminably situated "Hindu pilgrim" effectively eliminates the possibility of a point of neutrality in the cross-cultural dialogue. Mehta denies in this way the possibility of reaching an Archimedean point, that is, the point requisite in comparative philosophy and comparative philosophy of religion (see also Halbfass 1988; Panikkar 1980, 1988). Contesting thereby the noumenal abstraction that is the disengaged spectator, Mehta argues that the model of the *pilgrim* best serves the cross-cultural encounter. The pilgrim is not existentially distanced from the other with whom he dialogues. Rather, the pilgrim journeys out to an other, who, in its own irreducible opacity and thus dissymmetry, maintains the status of a *tīrtha* (a particularly South Asian trope for a sacred place of crossing/passing), an opacity that in turn contests the pilgrim's sense of self and home. The pilgrim thus allows the other's lessons to *displace* rather than *supplement* him. The Hindu pilgrim is an ethnotrope for a model of transcendental subjectivity in which the subject's intentional horizon is always incomplete. Contesting in this way the conservative emphasis of *philosophical* hermeneutics on the build-up of self through encountering the other (e.g., *Bildung*), Mehta's pilgrim emphasizes as well as embraces the *irreparable alteration* it suffers at the hands of the other.[8] In effect,

[8] The term *Bildung* is discussed at length in Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989). Considering it essential to the humanistic sciences, Gadamer characterizes *Bildung* as follows: "In accordance with the frequent transition from becoming to being, Bildung (like the contemporary use of the German word "*Formation*") describes more the result of the process of becoming than the process itself" (11); "In Bildung… that by which and through which one is formed becomes completely one's own" (11); "Bildung is a genuine historical idea, and because of this historical character of 'preservation' it is important for understanding in the human sciences" (12); "To recognize one's own in the alien, to become at home in it, is the basic movement of spirit, whose being consists only in returning to itself from what is other. Hence all theoretical Bildung, even acquiring foreign languages and conceptual worlds, is merely the continuation of a process of Bildung that begins much earlier…. Thus what constitutes the essence of Bildung is clearly not alienation as such, but the return to oneself" (14). Anticipating the full discussion in Chap. 3, the point here is that *philosophical* hermeneutics suggests that the other is a moment in the return to self. The self takes over the other through a process of preservation and supplementation. Mehta, on the other hand, conspicuously highlights the displacements and alterations suffered at the hand's of an other that does not become one's own. This is a subtle shift because Mehta too emphasizes the return to oneself that is essential to hermeneutics as such. But, again, the condition of the home to which the self returns makes all the difference. As detailed in Chap. 4, Metha's *postcolonial* hermeneutics emphasizes ruptures and not conservations.

the pilgrim is reconciled to the death of his *presumed*, essential identity. Becoming reconciled to the ontological displacement that results from the encounter with the other *as* other is an essential component of what I am calling Mehta's postcolonial hermeneutics. Himself playing the role of the pilgrim, that is, the postcolonial hermeneut, and having gone through the Western *tīrtha*, Mehta returns in the 1980s, both physically and intellectually, to India and its classical traditions.

In Chap. 5, I analyze Mehta's late writings on the Hindu tradition and his concern for the "logic" therein. I disclose in Mehta's telling citations from the classical and popular texts a Hindu logic concerned with openings, separations, relationships, and clearings, spaces in which possibilities can indeed be possibilities rather than determined effects. Mehta argues that there are three significant focal points in the history of this Hindu hermeneutic. Citing the *Ṛgveda*, the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Mehta reads the Hindu tradition as leading not to monistic totality and closure, an ethically suspect trajectory easily associated with the popular Advaita Vedānta to be sure, but rather to a certain loving acceptance of the other's irreducible alterity. From a concern with overcoming and domesticating the opaque other in the *Ṛgveda*, to a masculine and economic friendship between man and god in the *Mahābhārata*, to a feminine and an-economic relation to the structurally present absence of the god in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (itself disclosing the structure of *bhakti*, or devotion), at issue in all three focal points is a concern with the relationship obtaining between transcendental subjectivity and alterity.

For purposes of exposition, I introduce in Chap. 5 a typology that addresses the three interpretations of the self found in Mehta's three stages: the "thwarted self," the "nihilistically narcissistic self," and the "devoted self." I propose that for Mehta the concern with a transcendent other that denies relationship occurs in the first stage. Mehta finds this particularly exhibited in the *Ṛgvedic* myth (I.32) of Indra overcoming Vṛtra: Indra represents the "thwarted self." In the second stage there is a concern with the self-determining subject who denies his other. Duryodhana exhibits this quality in the epic in direct contrast to the mutuality of friendship between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa. Duryodhana represents the "nihilistically narcissistic self." Finally, the third stage supplants the previous two. Here the subject is the *gopī* in the Purāṇa. The *gopī* repeats the Vedic concern with the transcendent other but now, and instead of needing to overcome such alterity through Indra's heroics, lovingly embraces the other that does not submit to a reciprocating relationship. The *gopī* is the "devoted self." The *gopī* significantly does not need Kṛṣṇa's totalizing philosophy or yoga. What is more, the *gopī* also is not fooled by the immanence-to-self of a *causa sui* subject like Duryodhana and his "will to power." Mehta's *gopī*, that is, the "devoted self," is open to a structural other through whose absence the spacing necessary for the *gopīs'* ecstatic love comes to presence. I propose that Mehta's interpretation of *viraha bhakti*, or "love-in-separation," significantly traces a post-phenomenological understanding of the other. In this final stage, the other is precisely what does not come to presence, a presence so essential to the *Lichtmetaphysik*, that is, metaphysics of light and presence. Indeed, according to Mehta's reading, the other is not coming but is in fact *withdrawing*. It is precisely this dynamic of withdrawal that completes the meta-ethical criticism of transcendental subjectivity deconstruction begins but, once again, leaves unfinished.

Having analyzed Mehta's biography, his writings on Continental philosophy in the 1950s/1960s, his writings on comparative philosophy and religion in the 1970s, and finally his presentation of a postmetaphysical interpretation of Hinduism in the 1980s, I engage in a bit of comparative reflection in Chap. 6 by addressing what I indeed call "ethnotropes" in contemporary, comparative philosophy of religion. In current discussions of religion and postmodernism (a discussion itself curiously still wedded to a European horizon[9]) we see the repeated use of the Greek Hero (Ulysses) and the Jewish Nomad (Abraham) as "ethnotropic" substitutions for the transcendental subject and deconstructive subject respectively. We find this especially in the works of Emanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, John D. Caputo, and Mark C. Taylor. For these authors, the Hero always seeks to render the moment of the other penultimate in its assured return to itself. For the Hero, the other's alterity is a moment of edification and supplementation, a pattern tropically marked by a circular odyssey: Ulysses always returns to Ithaca. The Nomad, to the contrary, claims to have left the homeland once and for all. For the Nomad, the other's alterity, an alterity forever yet to come to presence, displaces the self, rendering the self ineradicably errant and homeless. While the Hero apparently continues an imperial, colonial hermeneutic, the Nomad more dangerously denies its own "facticity," its own "thrownness" (terms to be discussed at length in Chap. 3). Though intended to represent antagonistic positions, I believe they are in fact simple metaphysical inversions of one another. While the Hero desires the purity of its uncontested identity, the Nomad denies that it has any identity whatsoever, a desire in effect for a purity of difference, ultimately enabling a certain political indifference. Moreover, while the Hero assumes the other's presence and consequent transparency through conceptual representation, the Nomad always awaits the coming to presence of the other. Such anticipation characterizes the messianic nature of Derridean deconstruction. In this way, I suggest that both positions remain bound to a metaphysics of light and presence, the latter simply deferring the arrival of the other rather than contesting the formal privilege of presence as such.

Having characterized these two Continental types, I demonstrate that Mehta's Hindu Pilgrim provides an alternative ethnotrope. The Hindu Pilgrim, according to Mehta, acknowledges its irreducible facticity, that is, its irreducibly prejudiced nature as tied to a particular point of departure, but a point of departure nevertheless threatened and ultimately displaced by the other's alterity. I show that the Hindu Pilgrim expresses the paradox of the one who is both Greek Hero and Jewish Nomad, adumbrating in this way a "post-deconstructive subjectivity." Indeed, the Pilgrim is

[9] John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, O.S.A. have organized three international conferences on "Religion and Postmodernism." All three conferences, held at Villanova University, conspicuously privilege the Western traditions (in particular, Christianity and Judaism). The themes of the conferences have remained European: The Gift (1997), Forgiveness (1999), and Confessions (2001). Most recently, Caputo organized a fourth conference explicitly engaged in reflections on the future of Continental philosophy of religion at Syracuse University (2011). Continental philosophy remains just that, that is, a historically and culturally bound entity in need of cross-cultural interrogation.

the rooted one (contra the Nomad and in keeping with the Hero) who travels out to the other in an existential confrontation through which the original, intentional horizon is not merely supplemented but actually challenged and at times destroyed (contra the Hero and in keeping with the Nomad). The Pilgrim responds to the other's lessons, lessons that can be such only if there is in fact a return to the original horizon (contra the Nomad) in which the other's lessons can truly "hit home" (contra the Hero). Moreover, whereas the Nomad awaits the coming to presence of the messianic other, Mehta's Pilgrim, like his *viraha bhakta*, recognizes the other's withdrawal, a withdrawal that formally contests the metaphysics of presence found in both the Hero and Nomad. This is, to be sure, the essence of Mehta's postcolonial hermeneutics and it articulates what I call a certain *negative* messianic. But this is only half the story, for it only considers the Hindu Pilgrim's *cross-cultural* impact. What about the Hindu Pilgrim's "intra-cultural" impact?

Mehta's encounter with the West irreparably alters his relationship to the Hindu tradition. Accordingly, I detail the Hindu Pilgrim's impact on Hinduism itself. I show in particular that Mehta in effect solicits the popular ontology of Advaita Vedānta. Mehta's devotional logic precludes the space of Advaita Vedānta's monistic *mokṣa*, indicating in this way a certain post-Vedānta philosophy of religion. To be sure, the Vedānta more often than not privileges a position of fusion and stasis (a point Eliot Deutsch, Wendy Doniger, and Sudhir Kakar corroborate). The Vedānta, for Mehta, is to a certain extent a response to the fear of the other that remains other. Consequently, and significantly, Mehta sees the Purāṇic *gopī* as representative of *homo religiosus*. The *gopī* embraces the withdrawal of the deity/other that in turn opens the space for separation, dynamism, and ultimately love. Like the Pilgrim, the *gopī* is devotedly reconciled to her ontological incompletion. Mehta, following the traditionally gendered subjectivity of the *bhakta*, strategically deploys this feminine trope to adumbrate the ethical subject for whom the other's withdrawal dashes the illusion of metaphysical totality.[10] With this in mind, I conclude Chap. 6 with a brief discussion of the resonance between Mehta's feminine trope of the *gopī* and the feminine subject delimited by the maternal found in the work of Levinas. Both authors trace through the feminine trope a "post-deconstructive" subjectivity for the early twenty-first century predicated on the singularity of ethical responsibility.

[10] Although I will present a strong case for Mehta's logic culminating in recognition of structural incompletion, an incompletion preclusive of Advaita Vedānta's *brahman*, I will admit here that Mehta may not have had such a complete break from the Vedānta. I wish to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for drawing this to my attention. I will say, however, that the argument presented in what follows disallows an appeal to a both/and position, one often taken up by Hindu authors. The logic I trace in Mehta's work attends to transcendental conditions and as such does not admit of both/and reasoning. To be sure, the structure of *viraha bhakti* and the structure, so-called, of the Advaita Vedānta's ontology are mutually exclusive in the strongest sense possible. Of course, one could appeal to notions of *saguṇa brahman* and *nirguṇa brahman*, but this would be a mistake. The difference between *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* is not truly one on an ontological level, after all, *saguṇa brahman* is still, at the end of the day, misrecognized *nirguṇa brahman*. The Hindu logic I find in Mehta's work identifies two possible models for transcendental subjectivity and they are different in kind, not just degree.

Insofar as we live in a time that demands a certain ethico-political action through dialogical patience, Mehta's life and work are most instructive. Perhaps the late Wilhelm Halbfass recognized it best when he wrote, "Among those from whom I received intellectual and 'hermeneutical' inspiration during my work on both the German and the English versions of this book [i.e., *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*], I have to mention Jarava Lal Mehta. It would be difficult to imagine a better partner-in-dialogue" (1988: xi). It is to Halbfass's partner-in-dialogue's biography that we now turn.

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# Chapter 2
# From Banaras to the West and Back

## 2.1 Introduction

Much of the current project is taken up with Mehta's rather abstract, philosophical considerations. This chapter is the exception. Indeed, before plunging into the muddied waters of contemporary, cross-cultural philosophy and religion, especially as seen in the work of J. L. Mehta, it will be helpful to look first at the life that produced and sustained this work. I say this because what we will see unfold throughout this project is a certain synergy between Mehta's philosophical writings and his personal life. Although Mehta often worked on a high level of abstraction, his thought reflects as well as informs the dynamics of his concrete being. The relation between theory and praxis forms a creative reciprocity in the career of Jarava Lal Mehta. His concerns with the philosophical other are never divorced from his concerns with the other as embodied in a particular time, place, and culture. These concerns reflect, I believe, the predicament of a postcolonial Hindu.

In what follows, I address first Mehta's biography, detailing dates and places along his professional and personal pilgrimage. I cite liberally Mehta's autobiographical reflections in hopes of facilitating the reader's acquaintance with the central figure of this book. I then focus on Mehta's own solicitation of the "modern Indian intellectual," concluding with a brief mosaic of peer appraisal garnered from introductions and prefaces to his collections of essays. This chapter traces in this way the life and career of one of India's little known, though leading Hindu intellectuals of the twentieth century.

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## 2.2 The Birth of a Detective

Born May 31, 1912 in Kolkata, Mehta entered the world with a dual identity: he was a Smārta Brahman by culture, a colonial subject by history. These two should never be divorced. "I was born in a particular caste," Mehta reflects, "and in a specific subcaste and was raised within a life-world determined by this kind of thrownness. But I was also born at a specific point of time in the historical development of that civilization, culture and mode of religiousness, at a time when the interaction with another civilization, the western, had been in full swing for about a century" (LW 215). From Vedic *ṛta* to Heideggerian "hermeneutics of facticity" (topics to which I return in the following chapters), Mehta embodied the concerns of a Brahman intellectual caught in the cross-cultural encounter between India and the West in the twentieth century. As such, Mehta indeed belonged – and continues to belong – to that larger group of Hindu intellectuals coming to terms with a cultural landscape undergoing cosmopolitan development. Of course, Mehta's becoming thoroughly conversant with European traditions was never an exhaustive substitute for his brahmanical duties. Indeed, reflecting on his caste identity as being a "part of who I am, what I presuppose," Mehta saw himself as "one representing in some measure the continuing Indian religious tradition" (BBK 202).[1] Mehta's "brahmanical presupposition" simultaneously contracted as well as expanded the parameters of what a Brahman "is" and "ought to be." To be sure, Mehta in effect turned his back on the liturgical excesses of Hindu priesthood, all the while maintaining the role of brahmanical hermeneut.

Mehta's parents passed away when he was very young. His maternal aunt, with whom he was placed by the age of 3 or 4, and her illiterate yet apparently highly pious husband, subsequently raised him in Banaras. Mehta recalls that his house was in Ram Ghat, "twenty yards to the left as you face the Sangaveda Vidyalaya."[2] Growing up on the banks of the Ganga, Mehta was introduced to the devotional practices of Hinduism early in his life: "In the neighboring house, a three-hour group recital of Tulsidas' *Rāmāyaṇa*, with loud musical accompaniment, every week, formed the ambience of my life for twenty years" (MY 76). Raised in Śiva's city, Mehta indeed grew up amid orthodox/orthoprax Hinduism: "The general atmosphere around me was priestly, ritualistic, full of Vedic recitation" (P 285). Remembering his uncle in particular, Mehta writes, "(he) was the chief patron of the nearby temple of Hanuman, the tutelary deity of that locality, which also contained two Rama temples, all of which were visited by me every morning" (MY 77).

[1] This quote is taken from the memorial remarks Diana Eck delivered at Mehta's funeral on July 17, 1988. I will also garner citations from the remarks of Wilfred C. Smith and John B. Carman from the same service. I received this material while doing research at Mehta's home in Jabalpur. Mrs. Vimala Mehta kindly allowed me to photocopy this unpublished material.

[2] Eck's memorial remarks.

At 5 years of age, Mehta underwent his *vidyārambha*, or ritual introduction to knowledge: "I recall the day on which my foster-mother, the first and only 'Guru' I ever had, initiated me, at the age of five into the Devanagari alphabet through a reading of the first letters and words of Tulsidas's *Rāmāyaṇa*" (MY 78). Consequent to his *vidyārambha*, Mehta entered the *pāthaśālā*, a traditional school for training Brahman boys in Vedic recitation and ritual, the traditional education for a Smārta Brahman, to be sure. Raised according to traditional, brahmanical Hinduism, Mehta locates his Indian roots in this orthodox childhood: "The Indian side had been taken care of by my maternal aunt… by making me memorize vast chunks of Sanskrit Stotra poetry, and teaching me Hindi from the alphabet on, through Tulasi Das's *Rāma Charita Mānasa* and later through a Hindi translation of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*."[3]

While attending the *pāthaśālā*, Mehta began his lessons in English. "The son of our tenants downstairs (pious Vaiṣṇavas of the Vallabha school)," he writes, "was a master teaching in a primary middle-school. As he tried to teach me English in play he perceived that I picked up very fast. On his advice I was moved to a regular (his) school and during the 4 years following I just lapped it up."[4] At school in Chaukhambha, Mehta excelled in his studies, advancing within the first year through the first three grade levels. With this introduction to the English language, Mehta had set out on a course to the West whose return trip would commence only several decades later.

His Western-style education through his elementary school, middle school, high school, college, and ultimately graduate years notwithstanding, Mehta never abandoned the Hindu tradition for the new riches of the West. Though inundated with a flood of novel experiences and opportunities, Mehta remained true to his childhood education. In a letter to Wilhelm Halbfass, Mehta recalls:

> When I was 8-10 years of age, I fished out an entire *Parva* of the epic while swimming in the Ganges in high flood, dried the pages in the sun and recited it (it was the *Droṇa Parva*) over the weeks to the mother of my family *guru*. Also, there lived in Banaras at that time Pandit Ramā Nātha Vyāsa of all-India fame as a Vyāsa of the *Mahābhārata*. I, along with my swimming friend, listened to his exposition for about two months every evening. Pride of place was given in his temple-hall first to children, then women, then the gentry of Banaras. (Halbfass 1992: ix)

He further notes how between the ages of 10 and 18, he would wear not only the *vibhuti*, or sacred ash of Śiva (with which he also associated the "sacrificial ritual of the Śrautas"), but also "a sandal-wood paste mark on top and sometimes also a red round *kumkum* dot, meant to signify devotion to Viṣṇu and Śrī respectively" (P 284). Anticipating what would become his rather characteristically ecumenism, Mehta early on considered himself a "non-sectarian." He remembers in particular practicing the so-called "non-exclusion principle," which Jackson curiously glosses

[3] My thanks to William J. Jackson for sending me this personal correspondence he had with Mehta. The quotation, and ones following, is taken from a letter written to Jackson on the twelfth of January 1987. Most of the letter can be found in Jackson (1992b).

[4] Ibid.

as a "postmodern *syadvāda*."[5] "The *iṣṭadevatā* in the family which raised me was Hanumān. In my parental family it was Narasiṃha; but in my own case, for me, it was Bhairava at first, then Ganesha" (P 284). To this extent, Mehta, though thoroughly immersed in postmodern philosophies directly affected by Nietzsche's "God is dead," maintained a certain Hindu piety. Throughout his life, he condemned not, but nurtured the currents flowing from both the East and the West.

> Through my English-type schooling, I began to have not only an increasingly explicit understanding of my religious heritage, which encompassed the various social and personal mores as well as the language in which they were embodied, but also picked up much of the wealth of ideas and sensibility and norms of 'modernity' that the English language brought to me, two separate life-worlds coming together, existing side by side, interacting with each other in a way I could not conceptualize…. I avoided as best I could a clash between the two on a conceptual level, letting the process of parallel appropriation proceed unimpeded. (LW 215)

In the sixth grade, Mehta met his childhood best friend at Harischandra School in Lahura Bir, "an affluent Muslim boy" (later to become a communist), who introduced Mehta to "the riches of Sherlock Holmes" as well as "other things in the 'shilling shocker' class" (P 286). Mehta quickly acquired a taste for this type of literature. In fact, it is here that we witness the first intimations of Mehta's deeper interests in detection and disclosure, interests that would carry him well into his professional career. Transferring to high school, Mehta came across what he would learn to recognize as "literature" proper. "Soon after transferring to high school, I had my first introduction to what turned out to be 'literature' by way of E. A. Poe's stories – I did not fully understand but felt their power."[6] From early interests in Sir Arthur Conan O'Doyle to mature interests in E. A. Poe, Mehta's recollections indeed reveal a desire to dig down beyond the surface to unearth deeper truths. This love of detection eventually led to Mehta's interest in criminology and eventually psychology: "Gradually, interest in crime and detection developed into one in criminology then psychopathology and psychology by the time I was in College."[7]

Mehta specialized in psychology and psychoanalysis at Banaras Hindu University (BHU), while continuing his studies in Western letters, for example, "Greek philosophy, Kant and British Neo-Hegelianism." In 1932, Mehta graduated from BHU with a B.A. in Psychology. He would spend the following 2 years pursuing and obtaining a Master's degree "with specialization in Psychology and extensive reading in Freud, Jung and Adler." Pursuing further his commitment to psychoanalysis, Mehta spent another 2 years (1934–1936) studying "under the leading psychologist, the

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[5] Jackson writes, "The varieties of philosophies and religions for Mehta were important – they offer 'vast alternatives lurking' to ambush reductionist moderns, 'modes of importance' which could help safeguard against dogmatism which paralyzes self-criticism and halts the evolution of new concepts. He practiced a kind of postmodern *syādvāda* or 'somehowism'. Somehow each of these outlooks has a valuable point." (1992a: 5) *Syādvāda* is a term taken from Jainism, an epistemological position consonant with Jainism's emphasis on *ahiṃsā*, or 'non-violence'.

[6] Letter written to Jackson.

[7] Ibid.

pioneer in fact, of this country, who was also President of the Indian Branch of the International Psychoanalytical Society: Girindra Shekar Bose."[8] Following his tutelage under Bose, Mehta tried to find work in the Indian universities. Unsuccessful in such attempts, he settled for his Bachelor's of Teaching in order to find employment at least at the high school level. As fate would have it, the principal of the Teacher's Training College in Banaras was the uncle/surrogate parent of Vimala, Mehta's soon-to-be wife. They were married May 7, 1938 in the Vice Chancellor's Lodge at Banaras Hindu University.

Upon receiving the Bachelor's of Teaching in 1937, Mehta spent the next 7 years rendering unfulfilling service to a high school in Mathura where he taught psychology, logic and English. Though ultimately dissatisfied with the position, Mehta nevertheless began to garner a reputation for excellence in teaching, a reputation that would eventually prove to be his release from this "prison." While in Mathura, and despite being engrossed in Western education, Mehta would travel to Vrindavan during the rainy season to hear the local Swami speak on classical Hindu texts. He recalls, "Even as late as 1940 when I was immersed in Freudian psychoanalysis, I used to cycle up and down the seven miles from Mathura to Vrindavan in order to hear Swami Karapatriji, to listen to his discourses on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (the 5 chapters on the Rasa), for one whole month" (P 285). As we will see in Chap. 5, these interests in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* resurface significantly in what I call Mehta's postmetaphysical interpretation of Hinduism. For now, we note that these trips plus the birth of his daughter, Veena (b. 11/19/1942), were apparently among the few highpoints in Mehta's tenure at Mathura's Kishori Raman College. The "release from this prison of Mathura" came when, in 1944, Mehta met one of two people who would eventually "influence, help, and save, [his] career" (P 287).

J. C. Rollo was a Scotsman serving as Chief Education Officer in Rajasthan. Rollo, much impressed with Mehta, offered him a position at Māharāja College, Jaipur. He accepted. In Jaipur, Mehta found himself teaching philosophy, psychology, and English. He recalls how he had to re-introduce himself to philosophy all over again in order to teach his Masters students. He particularly remarks how he "discovered 'philosophy', and instructed myself about what was going on from first-hand sources" (P 287). This I believe is a significant development for Mehta, and one that would bear fruit once he returned to Banaras. In effect, we see Mehta begin one of two transitions discernible in his career – the first transition being one from psychology and psychoanalysis to philosophy, the other, undertaken several decades later, from philosophy to religion. Apparently Mehta was quite successful in his philosophy preparations: Rollo thought that he was one of the best professors of philosophy, not to mention English, in Rajasthan. Mehta taught at Māharāja College for 4 years.

In 1948, Banaras Hindu University announced an opening for a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy and Psychology. Though the pay was considerably less, Mehta had always held a fascination for BHU and had dreamt of returning someday.

[8] Ibid.

He applied for the position and got it: “back to Banaras Hindu University in 1948 as a teacher, the junior-most in the department” (P 287). Though the position was in a department jointly affiliated with philosophy and psychology, Mehta’s role was to be solely a professor of philosophy. Thus, at the “encouragement and initiative” of the Head of the Department, “an old teacher and friend,” “my earlier psychological studies were done entirely” (P 287).[9] Here Mehta’s first transition is complete: the abandonment of his early training and education in psychology and psychoanalysis in favor of philosophy. Though “abandonment” may seem a bit strong, I feel it is warranted. Mehta’s published as well as unpublished work bears hardly an intimation of an earlier 20 years commitment to the study of psychology and psychoanalysis. Outside of his autobiographical reflections, there is barely even scant mention of these subjects. Thus in the waning years of the 1940s, Mehta makes a decisive break with psychoanalysis in favor of philosophy. But notice that it was not classical Indian philosophy with which he was dealing at this point. Rather, he was immersed and immersing himself in Western philosophy. In fact he openly acknowledges his “25 years of teaching Western philosophy at Banaras, during which period I had occasion to meet a stream of foreign academic visitors, I became known as one who could ‘understand’ Western ideas” (P 287).

Although Mehta in effect abandoned psychology for philosophy, I propose that this change of focus all the same reflected a deeper consistency. Detection, psychology, and psychoanalysis all share the same logical form, that is, the disclosure of the latent. Mehta’s early interests betray the desire to dig down and get to the hidden truth. He liked works that spoke of deciphering cryptic letters and languages, of solving the whodunits. Is this not especially the case with psychoanalysis, whose archeology always involves digging down and back to the etiology, the root of the neurosis? To be sure, “the psychoanalyst is a detective; his or her cases are detective stories,” Mark C. Taylor notes, “When exploring the cryptic mysteries of the mind and body, to dig down is to go back – back to the beginning from which the present state of affairs has developed” (1997: 28). The preeminent Indian psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar similarly writes, “They [i.e., symbolic manifestations of a culture] are a rich and ready mine of psychological information for the psychoanalytic prospector” (1981: 4). Psychoanalysis is indeed a mining operation, unearthing hidden psychological treasures. The opaque other truly fascinated Mehta. “For a decade,” he recalls, “Sigmund Freud held me spellbound, not as the father of a theory of man or as the source of a binding *Weltanschauung*, but as the embodiment of all that was strange, questionable and deep, of science and inevitable pseudo-science, in the Western passion for forcing entry into the secret places of the heart, the heart of things as well as of man” (MY 70). I believe this enthusiasm for the strange and for detection eventually led to the subject matter of philosophy. Philosophy may in fact be the denouement of detection. Mehta’s interest in Western

[9] I want to draw attention to the words “friend” and “initiative” because these will ultimately play philosophically conceptual roles in Mehta’s work on the cross-cultural encounter as well as the Hindu Tradition. For now, it suffices to take note of the role they play here.

thought arose initially from a desire to detect what makes the Western culture, the other tick. In this respect, Detective Mehta switches subjects, not hats, a change in degree and not in kind.

1950 proved to be a pivotal year for Mehta. Prior to 1950, his primary philosophical influence was Ludwig Wittgenstein. "From this adventure (i.e., psychoanalysis)," he writes, "I drifted back into philosophy, landing eventually and inevitably into Wittgenstein as the central figure in the empiristic, analytical, neo-positivist thought of this century" (MY 70). The inevitability of this eventual landing reflects the predominance of this particular tradition of philosophy in Indian philosophical circles in the early-to-mid twentieth century. Here of course is precisely where Mehta becomes such an interesting figure in Indian intellectual history. As J. N. Mohanty attests, "In the mid-fifties in India, J. L. Mehta and I were possibly the only two philosophers preoccupied with contemporary German philosophy" (1990: v). While both were indeed interested in twentieth century German philosophy, Mohanty and Mehta were nevertheless attracted to different thinkers. As Mohanty pursued the phenomenology of Husserl, Mehta pursued the fundamental ontology of Heidegger.

"Nobody told me about Heidegger. Not when I was a student at Banaras, back in the early thirties, nor during the following decade, when I was trying to find my way as a teacher" (IM 20). So begin Mehta's memorial remarks on Heidegger, the pivotal figure in his long career. Mehta recalls how during his student days all the talk was "British Idealism, Bergson," while as a teacher "it was the mainstream of Oxford-Cambridge positivism and analytical philosophy." Such institutional bias cornered the market on what would count as philosophy and thus what was worthy of study. In 1950, however, the tables turned. "Nobody told me of Heidegger, until I read, around 1950, Werner Brock's *Existence and Being*…. Soon afterwards, I had the good fortune of being able to read with an Austrian colleague at Banaras the complete 1949 text of *Was ist Metaphysik?* which was something of a eureka experience for me" (IM 20). Mehta, the detective, the philosophical prospector, had struck gold. In keeping with his detective tendencies, i.e., the desire to know the unknown, Mehta writes:

> As one deriving from the Indian philosophical-cultural tradition, though not unfamiliar with the Western, the author could approach Heidegger's thought only from the outside, seeking to understand it for itself. He was drawn to it by the strangeness and novelty of this questioning voice; baffled and intrigued and challenged in turn by its difficulty, fascinated by its utter difference from the concerns of the other great philosophers in the Western tradition, while yet being so close to them; sensing vaguely that something truly profound was happening here and that a great art was powerfully at work. (1976: x)

Mehta had discovered a thinker whose novelty would eventually reorient him. Intentionally playing on the word "re-*orient*," I propose that Heidegger in effect opened a space for Mehta's new "Orient."

> Heidegger's thinking does not permit even the Eastern student of philosophy the luxury of being a detached spectator walking along a tortuous but well-marked trail. The very radicality of his questioning of foundations of the metaphysical tradition, and the extraordinary sensitiveness of his ear for what still remains unthought in the first thinkers of the West, *has a transforming effect on the Indian thinker's relationship to his own tradition and his perception of it*. (1976: x, emphasis added)

Indeed, for Mehta, Heidegger provided not only a challenge to the Western tradition but also and consequently a challenge and new orientation to the Indian tradition. The Indian tradition for Mehta would never again be the same. "I had found 'my' Heidegger, – the Heidegger of a lone Indian, all by myself" (IM 20-21).

While 1950 was the year in which he found Heidegger, it was not until 1957 that Mehta met him. In 1957, Mehta received the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Fellowship for 3 years study in Germany. After spending a preparatory semester at the University of Cologne with the help of Ludwig Landgrebe and Walter Biemel, Mehta made the move to Freiburg where he was to meet Heidegger. He recalls that his German was not adequate for such a philosophically sophisticated interlocutor. Even after a semester in Cologne, Mehta was "still quite inadequately prepared (as to my command of German) for meeting Heidegger" (IM 27). Veena Mandloi, Mehta's daughter, recalls, "[Mehta] went to Germany and he solely concentrated on trying to fix up some meeting with him (i.e., Heidegger)…. He said that he had to do it, all the talking in German which was hard for him because it was not the language he was used to."[10] Reflections on such concrete language differences eventually occupied a great deal of Mehta's philosophical and religious thought. As I will show in Chap. 4, for Mehta such concrete, vernacular differences tax the putative universality of philosophical concepts.

Mehta's initial encounter with Heidegger was in Darmstadt. He had traveled with the Japanese philosopher Koichi Tsujimura to hear Heidegger speak on "*Denken und Dichten*," that is, "Thought and Poetry." Following the talk, Mehta and Tsujimura were invited to meet Heidegger at his hotel. Mehta recalls that Heidegger had already received letters of entrée from Landgrebe and Biemel on his behalf. The initial conversation was light hearted and shared over a glass of wine. Mehta writes how he was quite pleased to find such a powerful mind manifesting such "a gracious, self-possessed, vivid presence, but he was a quite Western kind of *Rishi*, and for me a *Rishi* still hidden from view, still to be discovered" (IM 27). Not only does he explicitly reference his desire to discover here, but Mehta also curiously bestows upon Heidegger a classical Indian religio-philosophical title, i.e., *Rishi* (*ṛṣi*). Classically speaking, the *ṛṣis* are the early Vedic poets who wove together a tapestry of poems dedicated to the gods. Of particular interest is that what would be traditionally unacceptable, that is, the notion that a non-Indian could be a *ṛṣi*, is freely deployed. Panikkar detects the full implication of Mehta's choice of words: "The image of the *rishi* is more than an Indic idiom. It is a sound of alarm to Indian philosophy not to be too complacent with her own past, and to be open to the fact that we may need new rishis and even that such figures may come from overseas: two daring statements for Indic orthodoxy" (1992: 15). We will have the opportunity to examine this appellation applied to Heidegger a little later. For now, notice that outside of his general enthusiasm over the introduction to Heidegger, Mehta indeed alludes to the notion of detecting what remains hidden. Mehta writes of the "still

[10] Taken from a personal conversation on July 5, 1999.

hidden from view, still to be discovered" Heidegger; Heidegger's height (evinced by "*ṛṣi*") coupled with his opacity leads one to realize that Heidegger provided a deep philosophical challenge to Mehta's detective nature. Heidegger was the other that Mehta at first did not, or perhaps could not understand. Veena quotes her father's reaction to meeting Heidegger: "Today, I met him, I met the god."

At this first meeting, Heidegger arranged for Mehta to join him at his home in Freiburg, which was apparently "only ten minutes" from Mehta's apartment (a fact that gave Heidegger some pleasure, Mehta recalls). Two weeks passed and Mehta found himself presented with an unsolicited work-plan at the university, which Heidegger had "unobtrusively made." At Mehta's disposal, so to speak, were H. Boeder, J. Lohmann, and E. Fink. These three assisted Mehta in readings of Heidegger's essays on Parmenides and Heraclitus, linguistic studies of Greek and Sanskrit in "respect of their ontological implications," and other general academic consultations. Mehta recalls that he later learned that this special treatment came by way of suspicion: "There was another side to this thoughtful concern for me…. Two Indian professors had come for brief visits to Heidegger in the preceding years and things had not gone quite well. They were, therefore, a little wary of me in the beginning" (IM 28). Mehta eventually passed "the test." "How gratified and touched I was to be told one day that I was okay!"

Mehta considers his first *formal* meeting with Heidegger to be the one in which he joined Heidegger for tea at his house. Mehta refers to this meeting as a "one-hour exploratory talk." Among topics discussed during this first, formal meeting were Indian philosophy and the problematic nature of translation, especially as it pertains to philosophy and cross-cultural encounter. In particular, questions were raised concerning Paul Deussen's "Plato-Kant-Schopenhauer conceptual vocabulary" and its insufficiency for adequately translating certain South Asian intellectual concepts. These topics come as no surprise if we recall that Mehta's first meeting with Heidegger occurred 3 years after Heidegger had penned the famous, "A Dialogue on Language" (see Heidegger 1982), in which he and a Japanese scholar debate the pros and cons of translation between a non-conceptual Japanese aesthetic category such as *Iki* and Western representational language. As will be seen throughout the following chapters, this initial topic of language, philosophy, and translation would play a most significant role in Mehta's philosophy. Among the other topics discussed that evening were "Suzuki's account of Zen… [and] Heidegger's interpretation of the chorus song from the *Antigone* of Sophocles" (IM 28). This latter topic was understandingly of some importance to Mehta as it deals directly with issues of leaving home and traveling abroad, again topics to which we will return. When subsequently asked about his familiarity with phenomenology, Mehta replied unawares that he had "read a little about it." To this Heidegger sternly replied, "'One does not read *about* phenomenology'" (IM 28).

The indelible memory from this first formal meeting, Mehta writes, was Heidegger's petition that he learn Greek while in Germany. He quotes Heidegger: "Study my writings if you will, but while you are here, do not miss the chance of learning Greek. There is nothing more rewarding that you can do here." Admitting that his Greek studies fell short of satisfactory, Mehta retained the import of Heidegger's remark:

"The point of that remark went home and has remained with me, like a flash of lightning that illuminates the entire landscape" (IM 28-29). Now, it will be my task over the next few chapters to elucidate in what fashion this remark concerning the Greek language remained with Mehta. Did he eventually master Greek? Or was Heidegger's point, for Mehta at least, not one narrowly concerned with the Greek language as such, but rather with a return to one's own linguistic soil in general? While Heidegger may have been particularly tied to the Greek aspect of the appeal, a position certainly consonant with Heidegger's preoccupation with the Greek texts, I believe Mehta's reception focused on the idea of root languages, and in Mehta's case this meant Sanskrit (both Vedic and classical). Indeed, so little does Mehta seem taken by Greek that for such an appeal to stick with him as "a flash of lightening," it must be due, I argue, to its application to other "Ur-languages."

Heidegger concluded this first "formal" meeting by suggesting that, in preparation for their next meeting, Mehta should formulate and record some specific questions. Mehta spent the next month doing just that, working on questions in anticipation of the second formal visit with Heidegger. Reflecting on this period, Mehta writes, "How little is to be gained, I understood, by merely having what we in India call the *darshan* (sight) of a thinker of genius, or by just having an 'interview' with him, unless one is willing to go to school with the Master and to practice assiduously the 'handwork' prescribed by him!" (IM 29) I believe we witness here a second element in Mehta's reflections that challenges the traditional Hindu understanding. First, recall, Mehta describes a German professor of philosophy as a "*Rishi*." Now he goes further by suggesting that the popular understanding of *darśan*, i.e., that one gains benefits simply by gazing upon the guru or *mūrti* (icon) and in turn being seen by the guru, is not enough.[11] One must struggle with the guru. "For 'authentic self-understanding in mutuality does not lead to that soothing of one another which degenerates soon into mutual indifference, but is in itself the unrest of a mutual putting oneself-into-question, out of the concern for a common task'" (WC 263-264). It is precisely this "putting oneself-into-question, out of the concern for a common task" that sets the foundation for what eventually becomes Mehta's postcolonial hermeneutics.

The last meeting between Heidegger and Mehta started out as a leisurely walk through the countryside. Mehta removed his sheet of questions from his pocket and tentatively read off the first one, glancing from the side of his eye to gauge Heidegger's assessment. "As we started out, I read out my first question from the sheet I was carrying, and felt saved when, glancing at him sideways like a diffident schoolboy, I saw his face light up with satisfaction and approval" (IM 29). The first question had passed the test. Meanwhile, unbeknownst to Mehta, Heidegger was leading them towards the local *Jägerhause* for a glass of wine. "It happened to be closed," Mehta recalls, "much to his [i.e., Heidegger's] disappointment: 'I thought I shall have a glass of wine with you. Well, now we will have to do with whatever is at home'" (IM 29).

[11] On the prominent topic of *darśan* in South Asian traditions see D. L. Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

On the return trip to Heidegger's dwelling, rain began to fall. Without protection from the elements, Heidegger and Mehta ran towards the nearest shelter. "I vividly recall the sternness in his voice as he ordered, panting slightly: 'Put that paper in your pocket quickly! You don't want your questions and notes washed away'" (IM 29). Heeding the advice, preserving his questions and notes, Mehta accompanied Heidegger back at his home for a glass of wine and a toast to their mutual health. Mehta remembers those first few moments being rather tense until they "clinked glasses, the tension snapped and I broke into laughter." Mehta ponders:

> What had happened? This experience of deep encounter, was it between a student and a teacher, or between two human beings simply, or that of an Indian, aware of his tradition but seeking to understand the Western, in the presence of a Western thinker attempting to transcend the limits of his tradition from within the tradition itself? (IM 29)

As will become clear in the pages that follow, Mehta's reflections here are quite telling. Indeed, notice the juxtaposition of two thinkers both attempting to break out of traditional modes of thought and yet each utilizes tellingly disparate resources for so doing. Mehta encounters the cross-cultural other; Heidegger attempts to construct an intra-cultural other.

After dinner that evening, the conversation resumed in Heidegger's study. Mehta writes of Heidegger's "childlike eagerness" to retrieve various books and articles from his library, for example, an edition of Hegel's *Aesthetik* and a picture of the Indian saint Mother Anandamayee. Mehta recalls Heidegger's hesitation when he told Heidegger his plans to write an exposition of his philosophy. Heidegger thought this might be too demanding, suggesting instead that Mehta choose one particular theme, e.g., the question of truth. "That, I found out soon," Mehta admits, "was beyond my competence then" (IM 30).

The meeting ended with Heidegger walking Mehta to the top of a hill in order to point out a shortcut through the woods back to his apartment. "We stood for a moment in silence at the edge of the hill," recollects Mehta, "Heidegger held out his hand and, once again the teacher said: 'I wish you all the best for the commencement of your work.' As I parted from him, I too knew that so far it had only been, and would be for quite a while, only preparation for that '*Anfang*'" (IM 30). In 1950, Mehta first read Heidegger. In 1957, Mehta first met Heidegger. Twelve years after his first reading of Heidegger, 5 years after his first formal meeting with Heidegger, Mehta would finally produce the fruits of his labor.

Mehta returned from Germany in 1958 having used only 1 year of his 3-year Humboldt fellowship.[12] Mrs. Mehta recalls, "People at that time laughed and looked, 'He couldn't do it and he has come back empty-handed,' so many people said that."[13] Undistracted by these jeering peers, Mehta resumed his lectureship at BHU. He continued his studies in Heideggerian and post-Heideggerian philosophy, and in particular, the philosophy of Heidegger's pupil, Hans-Georg Gadamer. A few years

[12] The reason for his early return was not disclosed to me during my conversations with Mrs. Mehta and the Mandlois.

[13] Personal correspondence.

passed and finally the Vice-Chancellor of BHU approached Mehta and persuaded him to write something reflecting all the work he had been doing in Western philosophy. So in 1962, Mehta spent 7 months penning what would turn out to be his doctoral dissertation, initially published in 1967 by Banaras Hindu University Press as *The Philosophy of Martin Heidegger*. Apparently, Mehta never intended to pursue the doctorate; he saw no immediate use in such a degree. Nevertheless, Mehta finished the dissertation, a book of which Hannah Arendt would eventually sing high praises. Mohanty remembers in particular, "Hannah Arendt, during a conversation at the New School, said to me: 'Do you know that the best book on Heidegger, in any language, is written by an Indian?'" (1990: v). Mehta received his doctoral degree in 1964.

In 1962 and upon completion of his dissertation, Mehta was invited to a private college in Maryland to do some guest lecturing. This first stint in the United States would, however, be fleeting. While abroad, Mehta's newborn son passed away. On hearing the bad news, T. R. V. Murti pleaded with Mrs. Mehta not to bring her husband back from the States as his work was so important. Murti's request went unfulfilled. Mehta promptly returned to Banaras and once again resumed his role as lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at BHU (by that time, the departments of philosophy and psychology had split into autonomous bodies). In addition to receiving his doctoral degree in 1964, Mehta also received a Whitney-Fulbright Visiting Lectureship "during which time I spent a semester at Yale as Visiting scholar" (P 287). Garnering over these years international recognition, Mehta was eventually promoted to full professor at BHU in 1966. Mrs. Mehta and their daughter Veena speculated that, because of his reputation among foreign academics and his repeated invitations to lecture abroad, Mehta's promotion had been delayed up to that point due to professional jealousies among high-ranking members of the department, including T. R. V. Murti. All of that notwithstanding, Mehta continued throughout the 1960s to lecture at BHU on Western philosophy. He wrote extensively on Continental philosophy, including not only Heidegger's and Gadamer's philosophy but Jean-Paul Sartre's as well. It was during this time that Mehta presented a paper at a conference in Bangalore with Wilfred Cantwell Smith in attendance. This would prove to be decisive for his career.

Smith was immediately taken by Mehta's presentation and recognized a leading mind in contemporary philosophy and religion East and West. Smith attests, "We met about twenty years ago at a conference in Bangalore that we both attended. His contribution to the proceedings, both in his paper and in his comments in the discussion, were so striking that we recognized here someone whom one should certainly have here at our Harvard Center if at all we could persuade him to come."[14] From that point on, Smith and Mehta, with John B. Carman soon to follow, became best of friends. Mehta in fact refers to Smith as the "second (Scottish) Western professor after Rollo, to influence, help, and save, my career" (P 287).

Smith invited Mehta to come to Harvard to teach at the Center for the Study of World Religions. The prospect enticed Mehta. His wife recalls how he anxiously

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[14] Smith's memorial remarks, see footnote 1.

awaited the letter of invitation and appointment to arrive in order to give it to the executive council at BHU. Eventually Mehta received the letter and he proceeded to spend the years between 1968 and 1971 alternating between Harvard University and the University of Hawaii as a visiting lecturer. Upon returning to BHU in 1971, Mehta intended to take retirement from the institution that had for so many years captivated his imagination and respect. Mrs. Mehta recalls specifically, “He wanted to retire as a Banaras Hindu University Professor.” Smith, for his part, had encouraged Mehta to do the same because he wanted to hire Mehta for a longer tenure solely at Harvard. Smith felt it would be best if Harvard employed Mehta as a professor hailing from Banaras Hindu University. All of this, of course, suited Mehta. So in 1971, at the age of 60, Mehta retired from BHU in preparation for the following 7 years that he would spend at Harvard University’s Center for the Study of World Religions.

## 2.3 The Detective Takes a Turn

Cambridge, Massachusetts proved to be a cauldron of teeming intellectualism. Mehta recognized that the energy of Harvard far surpassed any he had encountered up to that point. During his tenure, Mehta, along with John B. Carman, pursued issues of cross-cultural encounter and understanding. In particular, Mehta recalls “the course given here jointly by Professor John Carman and myself, first in 1969 and then repeated several times in subsequent years” titled, “The Problem of Understanding” (PU 267). The course was broken into nine topics ranging from cross-cultural encounter in light of twentieth century Western hermeneutics to specific studies of contemporary figures East and West. Intimating a synopsis of the course, the directions for the suggested final essays state, “Whatever topic you choose, bear in mind that our course is concerned with the problem of intercultural and interreligious understanding in the historical context of India’s encounter with the West, especially since 1800.”[15]

Here we should pause and consider the significance of these concerns. I argue that it is during the years at Harvard (and in Hawaii to some extent) that we see the beginnings of Mehta’s second but most significant transformation. In the late 1940s Mehta, under the direction of the Head of the Department of Philosophy at BHU, relinquished his academic ties to psychology and psychoanalysis in order to pursue philosophy full time. This first transformation, however, was a transformation in degree, not in kind. Mehta had given up psychological/psychoanalytic detective work in order to take up philosophical detective work. Mehta’s subject had shifted from the pathological individual to the question of a culture’s deep identity. Mehta’s philosophical interests remained consistent with the desire to understand what lies

[15] This is taken from the syllabus for the course, “The Problem of Understanding” given at the Harvard Divinity School Spring of 1969.

behind the opaque other, and, in this instance, Western culture. Mrs. Mehta recalls, "At that time when he came back [from visiting with Heidegger] he had this clear picture of the West." Mehta studied Western philosophy because he wanted to see the other through and through. By way of Western philosophy, Mehta attempted to render the opaque, Western other transparent.

I believe that this search for transparency, this desire to be the detective waned during Mehta's period abroad in the late 1960s and 1970s. This is the second transformation; but this time, the transformation is one of kind and not just of degree. Mehta's detective work was coming to a close. Instead of seeking to uncover the other's deeper truths, Mehta refocused his gaze on the process itself of understanding and mutuality across cultures.[16] In part this was due to his introduction to objective studies of Hinduism. Mehta writes, "The Christian West came to me in the secularized form of philosophy and literature, largely – until at Harvard (1973–1979) I faced my own religious tradition directly by objectifying it and the Christian tradition in the form of theology" (P 288). Curiously, Mehta's interest in the Western Other here shades into an interest in the otherness of his own tradition. Mehta had now to understand not only how the West understands its other and itself, but also how India understands its other and itself. How indeed do others understand each other? This was Mehta's task at Harvard. M. David Eckel writes:

> In 1968 he began the series of visiting appointments at Harvard that culminated in his full-time presence on the Harvard faculty from 1973 to 1978. The essays "Problems of Inter-cultural Understanding in University Studies of Religion" and "Heidegger and Vedanta: Reflections on a Questionable Theme" show the interest in cross-cultural questions that came to play such an important role in his thinking during his years at Harvard. (1985: x)

Eckel is correct: Mehta's interest in Western philosophy wanes as his concern with the difficulties of cross-cultural encounter waxes. No longer dominated by concerns with an opaque Western Other, Mehta turns his attention to issues of potential and diverted mutuality between East and West, self and other. Perhaps it is for these reasons that Panikkar believes these years at Harvard were Mehta's best (Panikkar 1992: xiv). Although his tenure at Harvard was no doubt of great significance for Mehta, I would argue with Panikkar's assessment, especially when taking into consideration the provocative pieces written in the 1980s after his retirement from official academic duties.

Mehta spent a good portion of the 1970s reflecting on the problematic nature of comparative studies in religion and philosophy. He struggled with finding the point from which one could hold in equity the various streams of influence. Halbfass remembers how during the late 1970s Mehta "was interested in my attempts to combine and integrate Indian studies with philosophical reflection and European self-questioning, and to apply Gadamer's ideas in the context of 'comparative

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[16] John B. Carman suggests that it is with the 1968 publication of "Problems of Inter-cultural Understanding in University Studies of Religion" in *Ānvīkṣikī: Research Bulletin of the Centre of Advanced Study in Philosophy* that we see the first evidence of this turning. I want to thank John B. Carman for re-drawing my attention to this important piece. This essay is reprinted in IW, 114–134.

hermeneutics'" (1992: ix). In a letter to Halbfass dated May 2, 1977, Mehta references Paul Deussen's comment that he had tried "to build the house of my life there (*da*) where the lines of Indology and philosophy intersect" (cited in Halbfass 1992: ix). It was this *da*, this being in that *da* that Mehta struggled to understand and accomplish in these pivotal years in the 1970s. In the same letter, Mehta writes, "I am myself deeply fascinated, with that '*da*' but have never lived there except for occasional passing moments, having been struggling during these past years, to come back from philosophy to my own Sanskrit tradition." Here Mehta shares two significant suggestions. First, he acknowledges these years to be ones in which he was attempting a turn in his studies, away from European philosophy and back to Sanskrit. Elsewhere he writes, "My own involvement with the Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions for about 8 years has been a major influence at work in making me turn to interpretive thinking in relation to my own religious tradition" (RV 273). The journey to the West that had begun with the playful English lessons in Banaras approximately 60 years prior, had now begun an about face and a return to India. Secondly, Mehta's existential situation is laying the foundation for one of his most significant contributions to twenty-first century thought, i.e., the model of the pilgrim (to be dealt with at length in Chaps. 4 and 6). It is significant that Mehta's experience of this *da* is fleeting. Unable to hold in balance the Western philosophical tradition and the Indian religious tradition, Mehta sensed the precarious nature of crossing cultures and trying to understand that which originally belongs to the other.

Though feeling estranged from the Sanskrit tradition, Mehta nevertheless deploys metaphors in his writing that disclose his assurance that somewhere and somehow the Indian tradition remained an operative informant in his life. Referring to himself as a ship with a cargo full of Hinduism whose sails nevertheless were being blown about by Western winds, he writes:

> In both the religious and political matters, from childhood to formative years at school and college, influences from home and environment were working powerfully, but they *sank deep* within me, filling me like a ballast on a ship or like fully laden cargo in the hold of a ship, keeping me on an even keel. All of the other things… including the incessant and passionate lapping up of all that came to me from the West was activity on the decks, in the engine room, the captain's cabin, the winds blowing around me. (P 285)

Elsewhere, he extends this metaphor when considering his irreversible cosmopolitanism:

> My life-work has been too intimately visited by 'modern' secular winds for me to be able to take unquestioningly for granted my inherited modes of thought and living. But I am also unable, because my bond with tradition is not wholly broken, to take the modern present as normative or as giving me the right to sit in judgment on those traditional norms which still reach down to me with magisterial authority. (LW 219)

Mehta's ship indeed withstood the gale force wind that was the "Enlightened" West. Yet, as Mehta himself recognized, his ship could not stay at sea forever. Prior to Harvard, Mehta was engaged in analyzing Western philosophy. At Harvard, Mehta was engaged in the problematic nature of cross-cultural mutuality and encounter, the beginnings of a return trip. Carman himself notices as much: "Dr. Mehta… started

the homeward journey to his Hindu sources and resources while he was here at Harvard – though his studies of German philosophy continued – and in recent years his studies of the Veda and the *Mahabharata* have begun to bear fruit."[17] Mehta's years at Harvard indeed served as the about-face that his ship steered on its homeward journey. This aspect of circularity and homecoming plays a major role not only in his concrete life but in his philosophical reflections as well. We will discuss this "circular" trajectory in depth in the chapters that follow.

Completing his tenth year and thus securing a social security package, Mehta retired in 1979 from all academic duties at Harvard University. Leaving Harvard and the United States was a source of ambivalence for Mehta. Harvard had provided years of intellectual growth and friendship, qualities to which he was reluctant to say goodbye. Nevertheless, that his daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren were in India proved sufficient to sway Mehta to return home. Reflecting on his years at Harvard, Mehta notes, "Being at Harvard during these seven-and-a-half years has been like standing on the Himalayan peak…. I have been granted a perspective on the plains below, from which I come…. It is now time to begin the descent and return to the plains" (MY 65). Mehta had reached the pinnacle of academic achievement only to recognize the inevitable return to the plains below, a pinnacle "which is more like the eye of a storm than an ivory tower in the middle of a placid lake" (P 290). Harvard University for Mehta was the center of fervent intellectual activity, and, in an extension of his ship metaphor, he writes that Harvard was like "mates of a ship without captain and compass scurrying to the conference room in the face of impending disaster" (P 290). Applying this to his own sense of being a ship, Mehta in effect acknowledges the lack of a guiding center above the hull full of Hindu tradition that could effortlessly navigate the turbulent crosswinds of cross-cultural encounter. That he suggests here an impending disaster anticipates, as we will see, his eventual formulation of postcolonial hermeneutics.

Returning to India, Mehta eventually settled in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, his wife's birthplace. Here he would stay for the remainder of his life. For Mehta, however, Jabalpur proved to be intellectually stultifying. There was no one in Jabalpur with whom he could share his passion for philosophy and religious thought. In fact, Mehta often made trips to Delhi to find intellectual stimulation. But even some of these trips to Delhi proved to be disappointing. Halbfass recalls, "In February 1987, he participated in a conference on the Mahabharata organized by the Sahitya Akademi in Delhi. In a subsequent letter, he expressed his consternation that none of the Indian participants had referred to recent Western studies of the great epic" (1992: x). For Mehta, and as we will see in the chapters that follow, it was imperative that Indian scholars of the late twentieth century engage in their critical tasks with all the available tools. The implicit, cultural chauvinism Mehta witnessed at this conference was a symptom of the troubles beleaguering India's entrance into postmodernity. In this regard, and although having returned physically to India, Mehta had no intention of simply turning his back on Western scholarship.

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[17] John B. Carman's memorial address, see footnote 1.

## 2.4 The Detective Finds *Himself* Worthy of Investigation

Though Mehta's career with respect to his official capacities had come to an end by 1979, he nevertheless remained quite active with respect to research. Despite Panikkar's assessment that Mehta's best years were spent at Harvard (and Mehta himself may have agreed with this), his work in the 1980s evinces the maturity and sophistication of a truly cosmopolitan mind. In the 1980s, Mehta focused his critical gaze primarily on the Hindu tradition. In fact, it is only in the 1980s that we find pieces solely oriented toward interpretations of classical Hindu texts, e.g., "*Bhakti* in Philosophical Perspective," "Krishna: God as Friend," and "The Hindu Tradition: The Vedic Root."

The fruits of his final years went not overlooked. Mehta continued to travel abroad, giving occasional lectures here and there. On one particular occasion, Mehta received an invitation to give the keynote address at the New Ecumenical Research Association's Sixth International Conference on "God: The Contemporary Discussion," April 16–22, 1988 in Key West, Florida, as well as an invitation to speak at the commencement of the NEH Summer Institute on Thematic Courses at Harvard's Center for the Study of World Religions. He was most pleased to accept. Unfortunately, the roundtrip ticket bought for these events would prove unnecessary.

Deplaning in Miami, Mehta promptly lost his briefcase in the airport. This came as a great shock. He never lost anything, not even a pencil, Mrs. Mehta and the Mandlois assured me. Mehta was understandingly quite upset with the whole incident, a most foreboding episode in the last weeks of his life. Fortunately, the briefcase was eventually found and returned. He went on to deliver the keynote address, "Krishna: God as Friend," for the New Ecumenical Research Association and proceeded from there to Cambridge where he was to continue his studies on the Veda and the *Mahābhārata*. Mehta delivered his last public address on June 13, 1988 at the Center for the Study of World Religions, entitled, "Problems of Understanding" (PU).

Saturday the ninth of July found the Mehtas en route to the Star Market in Cambridge, their favorite grocer. In the doorway to the market, Mehta suffered a heart attack. Initially unwilling to go to the hospital, Mehta eventually passed away early Monday morning, the eleventh of July 1988.[18] Halbfass remembers this sad moment because as a visiting professor in Japan he was unable to present Mehta with *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, to whom he wished to dedicate the book. "When the revised and greatly enlarged American edition was published in 1988, it was no difficult choice for me to dedicate it to J. L. Mehta," Halbfass attests:

[18] As a last glimpse into the thought of J. L. Mehta, I can note that in his briefcase at the time were copies of Derrida's *Margins of Philosophy* and *The Truth in Painting*, Bateson & Bateson's *Angels Fear*, Eckel's *Jnanagarbha's Commentary on the Distinction between the Two Truths*, Nagatomi's *Sanskrit and Indian Studies: Essays in Honor of Daniel H. H. Ingalls*, Narayan's *The Way and the Goal*, and Bachelard's *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie*.

> I could not have asked for a more serious and sensitive dialogue partner. During this year, Professor Mehta came once again to the United States, while I was a visiting professor in Japan. I was looking forward to my return, to a reunion and to the opportunity of presenting him a copy of the book. J. L. Mehta's death, far away from his Indian homeland and destination, dashed such hopes and expectations. (1992: xi)

Mehta, the Smārta Brahman, the Hindu Pilgrim, died outside India but was nevertheless cremated with Hindu rites on July 14, 1988. Though passing away in a foreign land, those who cared most surrounded him when the memorial service took place. Among the notables giving memorial remarks were Diana L. Eck, John B. Carman, and Wilfred C. Smith. Resounding throughout was the great sense of loss, of losing such a great mind and such an endearing and humble man. Mohanty, for his part, remembers, "He bore his scholarship lightly. As always, in later life, when recognition and honours came to him, this did not change him. There was such a sweet simplicity about him which concealed the enormous scholarship that he had acquired" (1990: v). The July 22nd edition of *India Abroad* (a newspaper in India) ran this headline to his obituary, "Jarava Lal Mehta Dies; Harvard Teacher." The article goes on to read, "Although many students came to his course with ideas picked up from popular mysticism, Mehta encouraged them to break through to a serious understanding of traditions they had admired from [a] distance."[19] Indeed, such was the spirit of Jarava Lal Mehta, the philosopher and teacher.

Mehta once wrote of Heidegger: "Now that he is with us only in his work, and in time *be as* his work, each of us, in the East or the West, will understand him differently, find and lose him differently" (IM 26). It is now Mehta who is with us only in his work. Perhaps he too will someday *be as* his work. The remaining task for us now pertains to how *we* should read Mehta's work. What are we to make of Mehta's body of writing? How do we find Mehta? And once we have found him, ought we to lose him as well? Who was and is Jarava Lal Mehta?

One can, of course, look back over the preceding biography and answer, as Marc Galanter has done, that he was "an excellent philosopher, thoroughly trained in continental philosophy, who writes in and about the Western philosophical tradition. He happens to be Indian."[20] Mehta was indeed "an excellent philosopher," but is his "Indian-ness" only accidental, as Galanter seems to suggest? Not so according to William Jackson for whom Mehta is "a postmodern brahman… (who) does not fit the usual mold – in lifestory or in mode of discourse" (1992a: 13). A *postmodern brahman*? Obviously Jackson appreciates Mehta's interests in twentieth century

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[19] This was taken from an article saved by Mrs. Mehta and the Mandlois. There are no further references.

[20] This is cited in Jackson's prelude to *J. L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics, and Indian Tradition*, page 1. Galanter reviewed the only book Mehta published (outside of his dissertation) while he was still alive, that is, *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding*. Jackson notes, "A critic reviewing J.L. Mehta's book *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding* missed, I believe, a good deal of Mehta's intent and accomplishment." The review is in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54:2 (1986), 383–384. Galanter is the author of *Law and Society in Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Continental philosophy as much as Galanter. Yet, Jackson also maintains that Mehta was a brahman. This he does with some justification. After all, Mehta often referred to himself as a brahman, as a Hindu.

Mehta openly acknowledges that he was surrounded by Vedic ritual and liturgy, as well as Hindu *pūjā*, i.e., image worship, throughout his life. He himself once attended a traditional school of Vedic recitation. Mehta was in this way immersed in Hindu orthopraxy from his earliest years. Yet, Mrs. Mehta and the Mandlois recall that Mehta was not interested in the liturgical dimensions of popular Hinduism. Similarly, Jackson recalls time spent with Mehta at Harvard: "He was not involved in many of the externals of Hinduism at that point in his life."[21] Mehta in fact writes, "Religion had come to mean… a restrictive, paralyzing imprisonment in an outworn ritualistic system" (MY 66). While certainly betraying a distance from the practices of popular Hinduism, Mehta all the same retained a certain brahmanical sensibility. Veena remembers that at her wedding ceremony the priest mispronounced the hymns; Mehta became quite irate and said he would do it if the priest could not pronounce correctly, certainly an issue most dear to brahmans. Though guilty of eschewing the ritual practices of the brahmans, Mehta nevertheless frequented temples even in his last years. Once again, Veena recalls how he would always go to the Gaṇeśa temple before leaving Delhi. As mentioned above, it would seem that Gaṇeśa was indeed Mehta's *iṣṭadevatā*. This was no accident. Gaṇeśa, of course, is the Remover of Obstacles. Here we see Mehta implicitly acknowledging the inevitable obstacles one encounters on any journey, be it practical or philosophical.

Though it has become quite fashionable of late to describe religion, and especially Hinduism, as a tradition of action and ritual, I propose that Mehta presents the intellectual side of the conceptual division. Jackson rightly notes in this regard:

> For many centuries Smārtas have been engaged in what, if we use European terminology, could be called "hermeneutical projects." They have been reinterpreting, updating, reformulating on the basis of 1.) inherited standards regarding orthodoxy acquired through training in *Smṛti*, the literature of custom and law, and 2.) personal experience and creativity – intuiting needs of the time, often stimulated by contact with "others", whether Buddhists or Jains, Hunas or tribals, Muslims or Europeans.[22]

Here, of course, is precisely where we can locate Mehta's ultimate concerns. As I will show in the chapters that follow, it is precisely the role of the Smārta Brahman as hermeneut that informs Mehta's concerns with the Hindu tradition beginning in the 1970s and coming to fruition in the 1980s. To be fair to the outstanding majority of Smārta Brahmans who have never heard of Heidegger or existentialism, it must be admitted that Mehta's postmodernism turns his orthodoxy into a certain heterodoxy: Mehta does not merely recapitulate the traditional role of the brahman. In fact, it is precisely the role of *challenger* to the ossified tradition that Mehta felt was and is most important in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Mehta repeatedly calls out to his fellow Indians to embrace this task.

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[21] I thank Jackson for sending me a portion of his unpublished memoirs from which this quote is taken.

[22] W. J. Jackson, prelude to *J. L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics, and Indian Tradition*, ed. W. J. Jackson, 12.

## 2.5 Mehta's Petition

As a brahman thrown into the modern, colonial and putatively postcolonial world, Mehta found his way, errantly to be sure. In his many writings, Mehta addresses "the predicament into which a Hindu seeking to formulate a philosophical vision has been thrown by India's entry into modernity since the days of Rammohun Roy" (PPR 162-163). He continues:

> Under the colonial origins of his modernization, the Indian encountered "philosophy" and "religion" and began forthwith the long journey of reinterpreting his tradition in terms of these Western categories. More importantly, he began thinking about it and reconceiving it in the English language, not just to expound it to English scholars but as the principal medium of his own self-understanding. Such self-understanding was reflected back in new meanings being given to ancient words in the Indian languages, and it also expressed itself in the way traditional meanings were themselves reflected in his use of concepts embedded in English words. (PPR 163)

Herein rests the hermeneutical problem. For at least the last two decades of his life, Mehta grappled with the interpretive conundrum: Did Indians understand the hidden presuppositions behind the language informing Western metaphysics, the very same language and philosophy of empire? Was the Brahmo Samaj and its founder Ram Mohun Roy, for example, hermeneutically prepared to undertake the daunting task of opening a contemporary space for Hinduism to speak on its own? According to Mehta, the answer is, perhaps unfortunately, a resounding no.

> Rammohun Roy understood modernity in terms of Benthamite Utilitarianism and French Enlightenment and he understood his own religious tradition in terms derived from Islam and Unitarian Christianity, at least in part. Was he also aware that these notions, which for him were self-evident universal truths, constituted a particular, historical basis for his self-understanding, that the way of understanding he was bringing to birth in India was something novel, neither Western-Christian nor traditional-Indian, but an enterprise launched into an open and hazardous future? (1971: 491)

Of course, one of the most significant elements in his work is the presence of a sensitive, hermeneutic consciousness: Mehta consistently exposes the unsaid prejudices in the languages used for interpreting the other, both East and West.

Without fail, Mehta distanced himself from unexamined acceptances, as well as rejections, of Western thought. He understood thoroughly the inextricable co-implication of modern Indian thought with Western philosophy.

> It is obvious that as intellectuals living in the world of today, we are shaped not only by our own cultural heritage but by three other forces to which we cannot close our minds: the scientific and technological requirements of today, along with the general outlook and way of thinking that sustain them; the pervasive secular cultural climate of thought, expressed by the single word modernity, in which we are enveloped; and the free encounter with other traditions, religious and cultural, which has not only become possible for us now but which constitutes an obligation and a challenge coming to us from humanity's new vision of a world community. (PIU 123)

To this extent, Mehta warns against a lapse into an overvaluation of India's ancient and mystical traditions. He was no romantic. Writing of the tortuous path of thought,

he notes, "It does not terminate in the abrogation and supersession of thinking in favor of some kind of mystical illumination, ineffable intuition, immediate experience, or assured knowledge" (1976: xii). Halbfass also observes in this regard, "Mehta was far from indulging in sheer nostalgia, or from trying to recover and re-enact the spiritual and poetic delights of his Indian childhood. He knew he could not revert to a 'purely Indian' mode of awareness; he accepted his exposure to Western forms of analysis and critique and his 'alienation' as irreversible" (1992: ix–x). This is most significant for what I am calling Mehta's postcolonial hermeneutics: Mehta was irreversibly alienated from the so-called "pure," classical Hindu tradition.

So much did Mehta accept his exposure to Western culture and philosophy that he in fact took an opposite tact from the one ultimately taken by Edward Said (not to mention his disciples) with regards to the phenomenon of Orientalism. Mehta suggests, "Indians, whose modern historical self-awareness has been inseparably linked with the beginnings of this enterprise in India and whose religious involvement with the West has been less bitter, tend on the whole to evaluate it more positively than Said does" (MY 67). He goes on to write:

> How fascinating to watch India reflected in the Western humanistic mirror, as in the mirror held up by the Christian missionary or theologian investigating other religions, by Jewish, Muslim, Far Eastern, and Marxist scholars, and thus to see not only how these images have reflected the varying shape of world history, but also something of their own spirit and character. The study of this mirror-game is a fascinating pursuit in itself, but, beyond that, it may reveal something of the historically interlocked destinies of East and West. My understanding of myself as an Indian Hindu is inseparable, I have found, from such reflective mediation. (MY 67-68)

Here Mehta openly embraces the interpretive strategies of the West as aids to self-understanding. To this extent, Mehta departs from the fiery rhetoric of Saidians today ready to lynch the Western metropolitan theorist. But notice that Mehta's relationship to these interpretive models is nevertheless distanced and sober. While acknowledging the futility of a search for a pristine, unmediated Hindu Indian experience, he nevertheless castigates his contemporaries who fail to develop their hermeneutic awareness by capitulating to the Western prejudice. In other words, Mehta, like Bhattacharyya, issues a certain challenge to his South Asian fellows: "The primary task which faces us in this country today is, I submit, the task of a critical and creative understanding of our own religious traditions" (PIU 115). This is precisely the nature of Mehta's work in the last decade of his life, the discussion of which is the substance of Chap. 5.

Disclosing his postmodern tendencies, Mehta ultimately calls for a "deconstruction" of the current idiom through which the modern Indian understands himself and his tradition. To these ends, Mehta explicitly uses specific Derridean themes, namely, "the trace" (to be dealt with at length in Chap. 5). At a conference at Simla in 1987, Mehta argued:

> The Hindu intellectual, who has not only witnessed and participated in, but is willing to ask questions about, a catastrophic alteration in his traditional life-world during the last half century, has still a living memory of so much that has been swept away in the recent past. What other task remains for him, as a modern, than to go back to the sacred texts of his

> tradition and creatively interpret them afresh, make them speak meaningfully in the present? *This would involve both linguistic construction and a 'destruction', or in current parlance, deconstruction of the tradition, so as to make possible a free appropriation of its living truth*. (LW 216; emphasis added)

Mehta openly petitions others to do basically as he had done, or at least had begun to do. Notice also that Mehta suggests that there has been a "catastrophic alteration in his traditional life-world." Anticipating a full discussion in Chap. 6, here we see the sense that the encounter with the other is not merely a moment for the enrichment of self; rather, the other severely displaces the safety of such self-assured identity. In this way, Mehta invited and invites his peers to undertake the brahmanical task of reinvigorating the tradition from a free and distanced position. This being said, Mehta all the same wonders if Indians have ever really gained such a distance from their own tradition: "In regard to our own tradition, we have 200 years of apologetic, reform and re-interpretation behind us, since our entry into modernity. But how far have we been able to achieve that distance from our past which can enable us to bring before our view and comprehend the inner, dynamic structure of this tradition from the perspective of the present?" (UT 159) It is precisely this issue of critical distance that Mehta feels has been missing, and it is critical distance that is requisite for a true appropriation and continuation of the tradition. All of this ultimately boils down to the call for genuine hermeneutic awareness. Mehta contends:

> But the problem that this process poses for the intellectual subjected to it, which I find fascinating and not without an urgency of its own, is one of hermeneutic awareness as the presupposition of appropriating a tradition, whether one's own or alien. It is the problem of understanding the alien in terms of one's own prejudgments and of understanding ourselves, in turn, in terms of the alien as thus understood, of finding concepts and the language for expressing this novel understanding, and thus of overcoming our naivety in understanding what is going on now.[23]

Mehta, I believe, understood his task well. He understood that his role as brahman was to make the Hindu tradition speak in the contemporary idiom, but this was to be done with sobriety and patience. Moreover, it was and is to be done with the aid of Heideggerian philosophy. On this last point, T. S. Rukmani challenged Mehta at the same Simla conference in 1987. To this challenge, Mehta replied, "I shall answer the first question as to why we should do this, i.e., follow what Heidegger did or adopt his ideas. To my mind there is no choice. In fact we are already doing it. That is what being modern means." (LW 225) Or, should we not add, that is what being *postmodern* means? In any case, Mehta, the postmodern brahman, challenges all to undertake the path of Heideggerian and post-Heideggerian thought en route to understanding the dynamics of cross-cultural encounter, and from there the voices of one's own tradition.

Jackson opens his "Steps Toward the Whole Horizon: J. L. Mehta's Contributions to Hermeneutics" by addressing the "Hecuba Question." He asks why an Indian would want to study a Western philosopher. The point here is not to address Jackson's

[23] Once again, this is taken from Jackson's memoirs.

interpretation, but rather to acknowledge the legitimacy of the question. Paraphrasing Tertullian's famous question concerning Athens and Jerusalem, could we not ask, what has Freiburg to do with Banaras? What is Heidegger to Mehta? What is Mehta to us? Is he merely a Continental philosopher, as Galanter attests? Is he merely a Smārta Brahman? Mehta certainly issues an impassioned plea to his countrymen to take up the arduous hermeneutic task of uncovering the prejudices latent in the self-evident idiom, a task requisite for the reclamation of Hinduism in the contemporary period. Accordingly, how does Mehta's work challenge Indian perceptions of Hinduism? Moreover, how does his work challenge Western thinkers in the early twenty-first century?

I propose that it is Mehta's work in the 1980s that truly provides a novel challenge not only to the dynamic that is Hinduism, but also to Western philosophical discussions concerning the nature of the subject. Jackson would ostensibly concur: "I… discovered that Mehta had written a number of important pieces later in his life [i.e., after his Harvard years], pieces which I consider to be of *vital significance to future intercultural understanding*" (1992a: vii, emphasis added). Such "vital significance" comes from a man who "seemed to embody the spirit of cross-cultural philosophical and religious studies" (Eckel 1985: vii). For these reasons, Mehta is perhaps unlike other modern Hindu intellectuals, e.g., Gandhi. Mohanty puts this particularly well (worth citing at length):

> [Recognizing the 'Europeanization of the Earth'], one may want to move in either of two directions. One may want to, as Gandhi did… reverse this process, and return to the pristine purity of Indian tradition. The irony of this… was that his [Gandhi's] picture of this tradition was as much derived from the tradition as from the West…. There is perhaps no going back…. Here he [Mehta] is so unlike most western-educated Indian intellectuals who… in some manner [either] long to be free from the influence of the West, or so welcome that Europeanization that they see nothing of value in the ancient tradition, or… [they] yearn after some facile synthesis of the East and the West…. *Mehta stands, in this respect, all by himself*. He recognizes the irreversibility of Europeanization…. He insists that we cannot but think in relation to this historical situation, but he does not recommend that *we* just take over the western mode of thinking. (1990: viii)

Indeed, as will be seen in what follows, Mehta is an idiosyncratic, postmodern brahman whose life and work exemplify the sophisticated reflection requisite for life in a truly postcolonial and thus pluralistic world. His work in the 1980s evinces a unique confluence of Western postmodernism and traditional Hindu categories. As will be seen specifically in Chap. 6, Mehta presents a challenge not only to the dominant privilege enjoyed by Advaita Vedānta, but also the Western/postmodern emphasis on nomadism and messianism. Mehta adumbrates a subjectivity dually influenced by currents running East and West. In this regard, Mehta's essays present timely as well as significant contributions to the debate concerning the encounter between cultural others. "Whatever our response to these questions and to the hermeneutics of the 'East-West dialogue' may be," Halbfass concludes, "we should not disregard the subtle and intense reflections of J. L. Mehta" (1992: xiii). Indeed, it is to these subtle and intense reflections of J. L. Mehta that we now turn, beginning with his writings in the 1950s and 1960s on Heideggerian and post-Heideggerian philosophy.

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# Chapter 3
# From Subcontinent to Continental

## 3.1 Introduction

Mehta's knowledge of the Western philosophical tradition goes uncontested. References ranging from Plato and Aristotle to Aquinas, Pascal, and Merleau-Ponty demonstrate the ease with which Mehta navigates the complicated trajectory of Western thought. Among the numerous Western philosophical influences on Mehta's work, two immediately stand out: Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. So great was the former's that Mehta wrote several essays and his first book (his revised dissertation) treating solely Heidegger's "way and vision."[1] In 1977, Mehta confesses that "the principal motivation behind my interest in Heidegger's thinking (like my earlier interest in Freud, Jung and Jaspers) was the urge for the deep and unknown, the strange and the remote, the difficult and the unexpected, *for its own sake* rather than for any affinity it might have with the Upanishadic tradition in Indian thought" (IM 30; emphasis added). Like a true detective, Mehta intended to keep his personal mores bracketed from his investigation, studying Heidegger's thinking "for its own sake." As we will see, Mehta does not maintain such "existential distance." Elsewhere he speaks of his need "to come to closer grips with the full background of these gnomic and strange utterances" (TP 71). This being said, I propose that Mehta's concern with Heidegger (as well as with Gadamer) issues not only from a sense of bafflement, and perhaps a curious "Occidentalism," but also, and especially, from his particular historico-cultural context, his colonial and

[1] Mehta originally published his dissertation under the title, *The Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (Varanasi: Banaras Hindu University Press, 1967). Heidegger himself, who by the late 1960s and early 1970s had tried to distance himself from "philosophy" as tied to Western metaphysics, eventually criticized this title. Mehta was aware of this criticism, so when the University of Hawaii Press reprinted the original document Mehta changed the title to *Martin Heidegger: The Way and the Vision* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1976).

T.B. Ellis, *On the Death of the Pilgrim: The Postcolonial Hermeneutics of Jarava Lal Mehta*, Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures 3,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-5231-3_3, 

postcolonial predicament.[2] His expressed autobiographical intentions notwithstanding, Mehta's interests in these strange others reflect what Heidegger would call his *facticity*.[3] As we will see in Chaps. 4 and 5, his interests in Continental philosophy eventually come to play a rather significant role in his understanding of such Indian texts as the Upaniṣads.

Recognizing the global predominance of the Western metaphysical tradition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Mehta sensed that India had received this tradition as it would a "Trojan Horse," that is, a gift turned deadly. Western metaphysics introduces not only a style of thinking allegedly alien to traditional Indian styles, but it also claims a privilege with respect to the "pre-metaphysical" thought of India's *darśanas*, or schools of philosophy. Thus can we detect in Mehta's writings a concern with retrieving colonized traditions from the "tutelage to the Greek paradigm" (HV 227). That Indian thinkers such as Roy had begun a process of re-interpretation with respect to traditional Hindu texts during the colonial period, and under the influence of nineteenth century European thought (e.g., Kant, Hegel, Mill, and Bentham), made it all the more pressing for Mehta to disclose the hidden presuppositions therein. For Mehta, such a disclosure was and continues to be indispensable to the retrieval of cultural horizons not prematurely co-opted by metaphysics, a tradition, that is, characterized by the reduction of difference and multiplicity to simple identity and presence. Accordingly, Heidegger's work, Mehta argues in 1987, "is *the necessary first step* taken beyond Hegel, the breaking of the charmed circle of metaphysical thinking, an emergence into the open, where non-Western modes of thinking about the first and last things are no longer regarded as 'anthropological specimens', as Husserl called them" (TP 86; emphasis added). We witness here a significant change in passion and rhetoric. Above we saw Mehta announcing in 1977 an original, and "pure," interest in the other as unknown other without weighing the immediate convergences with Upaniṣadic thought. Now,

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[2] On Mehta's "Occidentalism," consider his statement: "Vedic scholarship has indeed 'advanced with giant steps' since Max Mueller published his translation of the first volume of Vedic hymns in 1869…. It would be churlish to deny the new illumination and a breath of fresh air and *exotic fragrance* offered by modern Ṛgveda philology and foolish to ignore its future possibilities" (HT 114; emphasis added).

[3] The neologisms "factical/facticity" (which are in fact becoming operative terms in today's discussion) are taken from the German *factisch*. Heidegger writes, "The concept of 'facticity' implies that an entity 'within-the-world' has Being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its 'destiny' with the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world" (1988: 82). Since I will be drawing repeatedly from *Being and Time* as well as *Truth and Method* (Gadamer 1997) in what follows I will place citations in the body of the text with BT standing in for *Being and Time* and TM standing in for *Truth and Method*. Mehta also glosses indirectly facticity/factical/factitious as follows: "It is thus that Heidegger is able to bring Western thought, for the first time in history, to an awareness of its specific limits, as something historically conditioned and 'factitious,' as based on specific presuppositions which have constituted its unthought, unverbalized foundation" (HV 230). Facticity thus points to the historically and culturally thrown condition of any one being regardless of metaphysical conceptualization and abstraction: *facticity* implies an operative/influential yet contingent and provincial socio-historical context inalienable from any one particular agent. As will be seen throughout this project, Mehta repeatedly uses this neologism as a corrective to the popular, modern conception of the human subject as context-free.

10 years later, he is not only interested in these "gnomic and strange utterances" as well as the dynamic between Western and Indian thought, but he also seems to be explicitly endorsing the idea that the Heideggerian deconstruction of Western metaphysics leads to a "liberated" East. Also notice the source of Mehta's concern: metaphysical thinking reduces the other culture's thoughts about first and last things to the realm of the universal instantiated, that is, anthropological specimens. Disparate cultures allegedly provide only examples of a transcultural genus, a genus presumably disclosed by Western metaphysics.

It is these concerns, I propose, that truly led to Mehta's interests in Heidegger's "hermeneutics of facticity." In fact, Mehta at one point states in no uncertain terms: "An important task of thinking… must be to put into question the layers of conceptuality deposited by the western philosophical tradition on the interpretation of life as factually lived, a way must be found to eliminate the baggage of traditional ontology and to interpret factual life afresh by means of a '*hermeneutics of facticity*'" (LW 212). According to Heidegger's "hermeneutics of facticity," the individual subject (contrary to metaphysical speculation) is always already thrown into a particular historical tradition, unable to achieve a point of absolute transcendence and historico-cultural neutrality. Mehta argues that this in turn significantly delimits the universal claims of the Western observer (and by extension the Eastern observer), entailing thereby a political and cultural pluralism (topics dealt with at length in the following chapter). All thought is ineradicably tied to an irreducible moment in language, culture, and history. Humans are in this way *respondents* to, rather than *authors* of, the inherited life-world.[4] The self is always already rooted in provincial soil. These lessons Mehta takes directly from Heidegger. He writes, "Heidegger takes the historicity of thought seriously, its 'facticity' and rootedness in a happening of disclosure which has its source in Being or, in current Indian terminology, in the Real, but in which man, the thinker, is necessarily involved as *respondent*" (HCIW10).

In this chapter, and as a preparation for an analysis of his concerns that will be addressed in full in Chaps. 4 and 5, I discuss those Heideggerian and Gadamerian themes that most often occupy, explicitly or implicitly, Mehta's attention. To accomplish this task, I first focus on Heidegger's "hermeneutics of facticity." I specifically address "the question of Being" (the central question to most of Heidegger's early work on facticity), *Dasein*, "thrownness" and "guilt," all of which are found in great detail in *Being and Time*. This discussion introduces, in turn, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics found primarily in *Truth and Method* (1997). Again, with Mehta's appropriations in mind, I examine Gadamer's theories of "prejudice" and "provocation," as well as his notion of the "fusion of horizons." Concluding the chapter, I discuss some

[4] Mehta writes with respect to the notion of "life-world": "The expression 'life-world' comes to us from the philosopher Edmund Husserl…. He held fast to his earlier view that all that is objectively known – the world of science, for example – can be traced back to the 'acts' of the transcendental ego, which is itself not a part of what is objectively given. But the world as it is given to us immediately, as we experience it directly, is no longer conceived by him as lower in truth-value than the theoretical structures of scientific or objective knowledge we build up on the basis of our immediate life-experience. The lived world is valid in its own right, is prior to all theoretical construction, and its truth is no longer viewed as only a prefiguration of truth as objective" (LW 209).

of Heidegger's "later" themes that resonate especially with Mehta's reading of the Hindu tradition to be discussed in Chap. 5. Anticipating that understanding, I particularly address Heidegger's understanding of the "ontological difference," the "opening" (*Riss*), and "poets/poetry" as found in such late works as *Identity and Difference* and *Poetry, Language, Thought*. I argue that in order to understand Mehta's contributions to comparative philosophy and religion, as well as to a post-metaphysical Hindu hermeneutics, we must first understand those with whom he dialogued. For Mehta, Heideggerian and Gadamerian hermeneutics significantly opens paths by which non-Western traditions may retrieve and repeat their own horizons in the contemporary age of "world-civilization." In this regard, I adopt an approach I believe Mehta's friend J. N. Mohanty would endorse, "He [i.e., Mehta] writes with the conviction that Heidegger can help an Indian retrieve his own tradition…. *It is first necessary* to bear in mind the main theses of the Heideggerean (together with Gadamer's, not worrying about the difference between the two) hermeneutics" (1990: 6, emphasis added). As I will show, Mehta indeed appropriates unapologetically those elements from Heideggerian and post-Heideggerian philosophy that speak directly to the historical situation of the contemporary, post-colonial period and, consequently, the concrete encounter with the cultural other. Mehta is in this way potentially the first thinker to apply directly and consistently the lessons garnered from hermeneutics to the cross-cultural encounter as such. "In his writings, Mehta recurrently invokes Heidegger's teachings, as well as those of his foremost student, Hans-Georg Gadamer," writes the philosopher and political scientist Fred Dallmayr, "with the intent not of recapitulating these teachings but of deriving lessons for our present context of an emerging 'world civilization.'" (1996: 92). What follows is thus a preliminary discussion of Heideggerian and Gadamerian themes that will prepare us for Mehta's deep questioning of the cross-cultural encounter (Chap. 4) and the Hindu tradition (Chap. 5).

## 3.2 The Hermeneutics of Facticity

Any consideration of Martin Heidegger's work must take into account the themes raised in *Being and Time*. In fact, even taking into consideration the so-called *Kehre*, or "Turn", *Being and Time* (so Mehta argues) serves as the "foundation" not only for Heidegger's later work, but for that of several of his contemporaries as well (especially Gadamer).[5] Furthermore, it is precisely in *Being and Time* that Heidegger undertakes his existential analytic in which he delineates the *facticity* of *Dasein*.

[5] Indeed, the turn, or *Kehre*, is not to be understood as an abandonment of any earlier position. Rather, it is the development of a way of thinking. Mehta writes:

> The essay on the essence of Truth, lastly, led to the brink of the problem of Being, to the problem of the truth of Being as the nodal problem on which everything hinges and where the direction of the inquiry must run round so that Being is no longer approached by way

I therefore focus my analysis here on those themes that explicitly address *facticity*, namely: the "question of Being", *Dasein*, Thrownness (*Geworfenheit*), and Guilt (*Schuld*). The following is not therefore an exhaustive treatment of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Rather, following Mehta's concerns, I have taken a selective reading from a highly complex and dynamic movement of thought.

Before proceeding directly to Heidegger's "hermeneutics of facticity," I should perhaps pause to address briefly a troubling question haunting Heidegger scholarship. Undeniably, we who live in the early twenty-first century must recognize Heidegger's suspect political affiliations. Farias (1989) and Ott (1988) have certainly called into question politically naïve appropriations of Heidegger. From his (in)famous rectorial address in 1933 to his equation of agribusiness with the production of corpses in European gas chambers, Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism and thus culpability, as well as his continued silence, would seem to haunt his admirers.[6] Perhaps unaware of Farias's book, and having passed away before he could read Ott's work, Mehta never addressed this politically suspect Heidegger.[7] To the contrary, he finds in Heidegger not the path towards justified expulsion or extermination of the other, but rather the path by which to discern great beginnings other than the privileged Greek origin. Mehta, to this extent, does not appropriate a Heidegger with violent and exclusionary tendencies. In fact, Heidegger's delimitation of metaphysics, for Mehta, makes "both possible and necessary" "the free encounter with other traditions… in today's planetary civilization… [providing] an unparalleled opportunity to reawaken… the sense of vast alternatives" (PIU 128). This search for "vast alternatives" reflects the concerns of

> of Dasein but proceeds from the truth of Being to the nature of man. This is the reversal to which Heidegger's thought was led by the necessity inherent in its own movement. (PMH 371)

In the footnote to this discussion Mehta continues the preceding thought:

> The reversal is meant to be understood in a historical sense, i.e., not as a personal event (a conversion) in Heidegger's life, nor even as a revolution in his philosophy, but as a happening in the history of Western thought itself.

[6] Heidegger suggests: "Agriculture is now a mechanized food industry. As for its essence, it is the same thing as the manufacture of corpses in the gas chambers and the death camps, the same thing as the blockades and the reduction of countries to famine, the same thing as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs," (quoted in Schirmacher 1983). For an excellent discussion of Heidegger's culpability as well as his continued relevance for ethical and political thinking see Fred Dallmayr (1993) and John D. Caputo (1993).

[7] Though Mehta never explicitly addresses Heidegger's culpability, we do know that he was familiar with some of these issues. Mehta translated Walter Biemel's *Martin Heidegger: An Illustrated Study* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976) in which we find the following: Heidegger's "political error of 1933 was of short duration, for he resigned his office as the elected Rector soon after in 1934. Hannah Arendt compares this error, not unjustly, with Plato's error. It is superficial to pounce on it in order to discredit Heidegger. Had the error been a result of his philosophical thought, this thinking itself would have come to an end with the correction of the error. What actually happened was just the opposite, for it was after 1934 that his thinking really began to unfold."

an author whose sense of the postcolonial and postmodern world impassioned a search for emancipating Being/the Real from a colonial captivity to a totalizing "ontotheology." Accordingly, I do not hesitate to state unequivocally that Mehta's own work, as influenced as it may be by Heideggerian philosophy, in no way enables a politically exclusive or fascist commitment to any one historical, determinate tradition. As we will see, it is just the opposite.

### *3.2.1 The Question of Being*

Heidegger's project begins with a concern for the meaning of Being. Locating the origin of such a concern solely in the pre-Socratics (e.g., Parmenides and Heraclitus), Heidegger understands his project to be a repetition of the "Great Greek Beginning." In this way, Heidegger is self-consciously rooted in the Western philosophical tradition. But why undertake such a task? Why should he repeat what presumably took place over two millennia ago? What was/is wrong with Being, or the contemporary understanding of Being, such that it should require a renewed investigation? For Heidegger, a specific, and significantly contingent, tradition of thought originating in Greece, and eventually influenced by Christianity, had come to lay exclusive claim on the question of, as well as the answer to, Being. This tradition, (and anticipating Gadamer) this prejudice, in turn subtly influences the very way we inquire into the meaning of Being (not to mention the way we conduct other activities such as "normal science," to borrow from T. S. Kuhn[8]). It is this tradition of thought, responsible ultimately for the "Europeanization of the Earth" (an idea to which I return in Chap. 4), that Heidegger questions. He suggests that the philosophical tradition, that is to say, the Western tradition (after all, for Heidegger the signification "Western philosophy" is itself tautologous, that is, philosophy *is* Western), maintains a certain identity throughout its historical permutations.[9] The source for this historical

[8] Thomas Kuhn writes:

> Few people who are not actually practitioners of a mature science realize how much mop-up work of this sort a paradigm leaves to be done or quite how fascinating such work can prove in the execution. And these points need to be understood. Mopping-up operations are what engage most scientists throughout their careers. They constitute what I am here calling *normal science*. Closely examined, whether historically or in the contemporary laboratory, that enterprise seems *an attempt to force nature into the preformed and relatively inflexible box that the paradigm supplies*. No part of the aim of normal science is to call forth new sort of phenomena; indeed those that will not fit the box are often not seen at all. (1970: 24; emphasis added)

[9] Mehta quotes Heidegger from *What is Philosophy?*:

> The word *philosophia* tells us that philosophy is something which first determines Greek existence…. The phrase "Occidental-European Philosophy" which one so often hears is in truth a tautology. Why? Because "philosophy" is in essence Greek…. To say that philosophy is in essence Greek is the same as to say that the Occident and Europe, and they alone, are in their inmost historical course originally "philosophical." This is proved by the rise and domination of the sciences…. The word *philosophia* appears as it were as the birth-certificate of our own history; we might even say, as the birth-certificate of the contemporary epoch in world-history which calls itself the Atomic Age. (UT 138-139)

perseverance ultimately rests with the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. "What these two men achieved," writes Heidegger, "was to persist through many alterations and 'retouchings' down to the 'logic' of Hegel" (BT 21). Mehta concurs:

> The novel feature of the world in which we live today, whatever may be the religious tradition to which we belong, is that we are all inextricably caught up in what Heidegger has called 'world civilization', a process which has spread out from its origin in the West, of which the roots go back to the Greek-Christian foundations of Western civilization and of which the fruits are manifest in modern science and technology. (PU 271-272)

Notice immediately Mehta's sense of a certain inescapability from the global process whose roots go back to "Greek-Christian foundations." This inescapability constitutes partially the gravity of the postcolonial predicament for Mehta. It matters not to which parochial tradition one pays lip service; everyone participates in the Western metaphysical tradition. Granted, of course, that the West's intellectual heritage is perhaps more complicated and multifaceted than he would seem to allow, Heidegger's point is not to deny other trajectories of thought, but simply to insist that only Western metaphysical thought rightly claims preeminence over the past two millennia in the West, as well as the world in today's "Atomic Age." Precisely to this extent, it is the awakening of vast cultural alternatives, an awakening dependent on Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity that is most significant for Mehta.

According to Heidegger, the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions laid the foundations for the determination of "Being" as presence, as *ousia*. Heidegger writes, "The outward evidence for this is the treatment of the meaning of Being as παρουσία (*parousia*) or οὐσία (*ousia*), which signifies in ontologico-temporal terms, 'presence.' Entities are grasped in their Being as 'presence'; this means that they are understood with regard to a definite mode of time – the Present" (BT 47). To be is to be present, and to be present is not to become. In this way, being persists in the present, and that which is no longer, or is not yet, is not. This determination of being enables the classical metaphysical distinction between being and becoming, the latter being an indication of that which fails to persist as itself through the passage of time. In this regard, being and time oppose one another. While the conjunction "and" in Heidegger's title, *Being and Time*, seemingly repeats the Greek metaphysical opposition between the two, it actually serves as a marker of identity. Herein rests Heidegger's great challenge, that is, to think of the meaning of being as something temporal rather than static. On an epistemological register, presence is indubitable certainty through reason, "an expression," the late American pragmatic philosopher Richard Rorty rightly notes, "of the hope that truth may become *evident*, undeniable, clearly present to the mind" (1991: 33–34). Presence, so understood, is the simultaneity of meaning with thought. Consciousness and its content are immediately present one to the other.[10] Presence enables knowledge. What we know with certainty

[10] The French deconstructionist philosopher Jacques Derrida similarly notes, "The privilege accorded to consciousness… means a privilege accorded to the present" (1973: 147).

corresponds with that which *is*. Including the Christian theologian St. Augustine in the discussion, Mehta points out:

> Seeking to reflect on the reality or Being of Time and of God on the basis of lived experience, Augustine lapses into the representational thinking of metaphysics as it has unfolded itself since Plato, and hence conceives time in Aristotelian terms and Being as 'constancy of presence' in the Greek manner. *This conception of Being is the basic presupposition on which the entire tradition of metaphysical thinking in the West rests*, a presupposition of which metaphysics itself is aware indeed but not *as* a presupposition. (PMH 15; emphasis added)

Metaphysical thought is the product of the assumption that Being is tied to presence, to that which does not come and go. As Mehta points out, metaphysics understands its presupposition, but not *as* a presupposition. Metaphysics fails to recognize that Being and truth determined as that which is always present, that is, as something subtending the passage of time, may in fact be a limiting conceptualization rather than transparent reality.

According to such a "metaphysics of presence," Being is thought to be the most general element common to all beings that are. Individual beings participate in Being. The fleeting moments of the passing present depend upon a permanent presence for their existence. In this way, that which becomes is merely accidental, whereas Being is essential and non-temporal. What is more, for both Heidegger and Mehta, this irreducible Being (ontology) often leads to a philosophy of the highest Being, that is, theology. The most general and present Being becomes the Supreme Being, or *summum ens*, that ultimately accounts for, by enabling, particular being. This is clearly the case for St. Augustine, for whom God is the only eternal being enabling beings to come and go (2009). Metaphysics reduces in this way transient singularity and difference to a universal being, structure, or idea. Hailed by most monotheistic traditions as God, as well as pronounced dead by Nietzsche (but simply to be replaced by the will-to-power, according to Heidegger), this irreducible structure accounts for and grounds the possibility of all things. Beings may come and go, but that which enables their passage apparently escapes the vicissitudes of time. Heidegger explains:

> Metaphysics thinks of beings as such, that is, in general. Metaphysics thinks of beings as such, as a whole. Metaphysics thinks of the Being of beings both in the ground-giving unity of what is most general, what is indifferently valid everywhere, and also in the unity of the all that accounts for the ground, that is, of the All-Highest…. Therefore all metaphysics is at bottom, and from the ground up, what grounds, what gives account of the ground, what is called to account by the ground, and finally what calls the ground to account…. Metaphysics is theo-logic because it is onto-logic. It is onto-logic because it is theo-logic. The onto-theological essential constitution of metaphysics cannot be explained in terms of either theologic or ontologic. (1969: 58, 60)

"Ontotheology" is the metaphysical designation for the fundamental ground of all things that simultaneously enjoys subjectivity. To be sure, it is one thing to think that there is a fundamental essence supporting all individual beings; it is quite another to suggest that this fundamental essence possesses self-awareness, that is, has the capacity to say, "I am." This is, of course, a position most common to theological traditions. For the "ontotheologian," gratuity is not. Everything is accounted for.

For this reason, the aboriginal plenitude of Being renders difference and singularity privative. Heidegger thus speaks of ontology's "methodologically unrestrained tendency to derive everything and anything from some simple 'primal ground'" (BT 170). Mehta explains further:

> Metaphysics deals with the essent *qua* essent (*on e on*) and offers a *logos* (statement) about the *on* (the essent, what is). Concerned with the is-ness (*Seiendheit*, *ousia*) of the essent, it seeks all the time to represent essents as such in their totality. And it does this in a two-fold manner, representing in the first place, the totality of essents as such in respect of their most general features and at the same time, secondly, this totality in the sense of the highest and therefore the most divine essent. Because it seeks to represent the essent *qua* essent, metaphysics has intrinsically had this two-fold *ontotheological* character ever since Aristotle developed the conception of a 'First Philosophy' (*prote philosophia*) in his *Metaphysics*. (HCIW 33)

This highest being, this "most divine essent," takes from Christianity in particular the character of an absolute subject (*causa sui*) for whom all others are in the last instance its creatures. Heidegger, as Mehta certainly recognizes, wants to refute precisely this position that maintains "an idealized absolute subject" outside of time and history. Being *is not* some permanently self-present substance or subject. "Both the contention that there are 'eternal truths' and the jumbling together of Dasein's phenomenally grounded 'ideality' with an idealized absolute subject," Heidegger argues, "belong to those residues of Christian theology within philosophical problematics which have not as yet been radically extruded" (BT 272).

Heidegger, putatively disclosing the invariable logic of the Western tradition, recognizes, as does Mehta, that there have been many "substitutions" throughout Western history for this basic idea of Being as presence/present. While most modern thinkers no longer speak of Plato's *eidos*, they nevertheless talk about the human subject, the dialectical process, the will-to-power, etc. All share the same characteristic: they account for the Being of all beings. Metaphysics seeks in this way some universal, supra-temporal element that can take responsibility for the generation of historical traditions over time. What appear on one register to be genuinely different understandings of history and reality turn out to be nothing more than substitutes for the ground.[11] Whether we are talking about *ousia* or the will-to-power, we remain committed to the notion that something rational must account for the seemingly irrational passage of time. For instance, and anticipating our discussion in Chap. 6, Heidegger locates the birth of modernity in the dialectical inversion of the creator-creature dyad: "Creativity, previously the unique property of the biblical god, becomes the distinctive mark of human activity" (1977a: 64). Here Heidegger suggests that while the centrality of the creator god is questioned and overcome, the centrality of the creative subject as such forges ahead. Through a simple reversal, substitutions for the imperious center are arranged:

[11] Rorty notes in this regard, "From Heidegger's point of view, Plato, Descartes, Hegel, and positivism are just so many power plays. They are so many claims to have read the script of the drama we are acting out, thus relieving us of the need to make up this drama as we go along," (1991: 33).

> The ground is that from which beings as such are what they are in their becoming, perishing, and persisting as something that can be known, handled, and worked upon. As the ground, Being brings beings in each case to presencing. The ground shows itself as presence. The present of presence consists in the fact that it brings what is present each in its own way to presence. *In accordance with the given type of presence*, the ground has the character of grounding as the ontic causation of the actual, the transcendental making possible of the objectivity of the objects, the dialectical mediation of the movement of absolute spirit and of the historical process of production, and the will to power positing values. (1977b: 432)[12]

Common to all, Being, regardless of its mask, retains an immutable centrality through the passage of (ultimately inconsequential) time. Accordingly, Being is invariable presence.[13] Contesting not only this simple presence of Being, but the metaphysical presence-to-self of the idealized absolute subject as well – what Husserl calls the transcendental subject or ego – Heidegger argues that the subject of knowledge is always already "phenomenally grounded," and thus historical and temporal, that is, *factical*.

Opposing directly classical metaphysics, the co-implication of Being and time most concerns Heidegger. It would appear that an evasion of temporality and by a certain extension contingency informs the search for presence. Being, or its substituted equivalent, was supposed to mitigate what was and is in effect existential anxiety. The invariable presence of Being ostensibly makes the evanescence of time epiphenomenal and thus reducible: invariable presence alleviates the anxiety produced by "being… at stake in the game from the outset."[14] But what if the metaphysics of presence, that is to say, presence itself is merely the effect of an ontological evanescence? Heidegger addresses precisely this point. Heidegger, according to Rorty, "would like to recapture a sense of *contingency*, of the fragility and riskiness of any human project – a sense which the ontotheological tradition has made it hard to attain." He also notes, "This quest for certainty, clarity, and direction from outside can also be viewed as an attempt to escape from time" (1991: 34). The anxiety generated by the sense of ultimate contingency, being at play in the

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[12] Notice of course that Heidegger here refers to Locke, Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. Derrida also notices this same gamut of substitutions. He writes, "The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies…. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence – *eidos, arche, telos, energeia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *aletheia,* transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth" (1978: 279–280).

[13] Simon Critchley similarly observes, "In a classical context… the subject is the subject of predication; the *hupokeimenon* is that which persists through change, the sub-stratum, and which has a function analogous to matter (*hule*). It is matter that persists through the changes that form (*morphe*) imposes upon it. In remembrance of this sense of subject, one still speaks of a subject matter (*e hupokeime hule, subjecta materia*) as that with which thought deals, the matter of a discussion or the subject of a book or a painting" (1996: 13).

[14] Derrida notes, "The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play. And on the basis of this certitude anxiety can be mastered, for anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were at stake in the game from the outset" (1978: 279).

game from the outset, motivates the Western metaphysical search for a present Being. In this regard, Being as presence is not actually fundamental. Instead, it appears to be the product of a more primordial matter. For Heidegger, this more primordial matter pertains to the factical, and ultimately contingent, subject, that is to say, *Dasein*.

### *3.2.2 Dasein*

For Heidegger, the investigation of Being must begin with an examination of that being for whom the question of Being is even an issue. Who or what asks the questions concerning the meaning of Being, or the meaning of anything whatsoever for that matter? In other words, *who* cares? Heidegger answers, *Dasein* (literally, 'Being-there'). For Heidegger, Dasein is the entity that asks about Being. Though this seems to be a simple question regarding the subjectivity of the subject, we must not presume that Dasein is the latest appellation for Descartes's worldless cogito, or Kant's/Husserl's transcendental subject. What exactly is Dasein?

Immediately we pause. The very interrogative form, "What is…?" betrays the subject matter. Heidegger proffers this significant caveat: "When we designate this entity with the term 'Dasein,' we are expressing not its 'what' (as if it were a table, house or tree)" (BT 67). To ask after the "what" of Dasein is, according to Heidegger, to frame the question incorrectly. The "what" invites a reflection on essence. For example, while multiple instances of tree can ostensibly be reduced to the "what-ness"/genus/essence of tree-ness, it is Dasein that thwarts such reduction. Dasein does not have an essence. "In the academic language of philosophy, 'essence' means *what* something is; in Latin, *quid. Quidditas*, whatness, provides the answer to the question concerning essence," Heidegger writes, "For example, what pertains to all kinds of trees – oaks, beeches, birches, firs – is the same 'treeness.' Under this inclusive genus – the 'universal' – fall all real and possible trees" (1977a: 29). This is indeed the Platonic inheritance. To be sure, Plato invites reflection on the Forms that inform accidental matter. Mehta notes in this regard, "In the terminology of the Platonic, metaphysical tradition, what something is, the 'what' of anything (*to ti estin*) constitutes the nature or essence (the *essentia*) of that thing" (HD 51). Now, with respect to "What is Dasein?" Heidegger cautions, "Dasein is never to be taken ontologically as an instance or special case of some genus of entities as things that are present-at-hand" (BT 67-68). Dasein is not the particular instantiation of some universal category, some universal anthropology such that its temporal accidents can be eliminated from its essential character, which is to say, "*the essence of Dasein lies in its existence*" (BT 67). Dasein is precisely what does *not* manifest timelessly present characteristics, but rather manifests timelessly temporal structures. Dasein is not something in time; Dasein is time.

Dasein frustrates metaphysical representation, that is to say, it is irreducible to the concept. Ultimately intended to grasp that which underlies the flux of appearances,

the concept putatively accounts for that which arises and passes away. The concept forces contingent multiplicity into a rational form(ula). Yet can the concept account for what may turn out to be the irrational flux that is life? Mehta contends, "Metaphysical conceptuality is not adequate to life experience in its actuality since in the latter what is most important is not so much the content or a 'what' that can be encompassed in a concept as rather *the unobjectifiable living-through, the movement and unrest of life as essentially a process of happening, as temporality itself, not just something in time*" (LW 212-213; emphasis added). Here Mehta argues that time is not an accidental accretion to the core that is Dasein; rather, Dasein *is* its existence, and as such it is the actual and singular "living-through" of the contingent fluctuations of time and culture. This most assuredly contests metaphysics: "The concepts of subject, ground and enduring presence, in terms of which Being has been conceived since Plato, are utterly inadequate to the truth of Being itself" (CS 23).[15]

Traditionally in the West, and perhaps in some traditions of the East, essence provides the immutable foundation to which historical accidents accrue. Not only do we think of Plato's doctrine of forms, but we could perhaps also point in the East to the Vaiśeṣika's *sāmānyas* and *viśeṣas*.[16] Such a Platonic privilege, in due course, allegorizes singularity and the empirical event. That is to say, the singular historical event finds its significance only when either justified by its "blueprint," or when read into the larger narrative of world history. The fleeting is putatively nothing but a sign pointing to the permanent. Alleviating its anxiety, "Our tradition," Rorty points out, "has suggested that the fragile and transitory can safely be neglected" (1991: 34). Yet existence, "the fragile and transitory," for Heidegger, as it most certainly is for Mehta, is precisely what does not reduce to some conceptual totality, or *grand récit*, infinitely recollect-able as it is in itself. To the contrary, Dasein is *open* for possibilities *as* possibilities. Dasein is open to the future *as* future, in which case the future is not pre-determined by essence. Heidegger writes:

> By the term 'futural', we do not here have in view a 'now' which has not yet become 'actual' and which sometime will be for the first time. We have in view the coming [Kunft] in which Dasein, in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, comes towards itself. Anticipation makes Dasein *authentically* futural, and in such a way that the anticipation itself is possible only in so far as Dasein, as being, is always coming towards itself – that is to say, in so far as it is futural in its Being in general. (BT 373)

Dasein's very structure, if a structure it be, includes an orientation to future as such, a real future into which chance and contingency fall. Phenomenologically speaking, the authentic future, chance, comes to presence as surprise, that is, unfamiliarity. "Lack of familiarity is not merely something occasional," Heidegger writes, "but rather belongs to the very temporality of the world's being-encountered….

[15] M. E. Zimmerman comments in this regard, "Plato conceived of being not as the dynamic presencing of entities, but rather as the eternally present, unchanging blueprint, form (*eidos*), or model for things in the realm of becoming" (1993: 249).

[16] Here I am suggesting an analogous relation between Plato's ideas (*eidos*) and the Vaiśeṣika universal (*sāmānya*). For a detailed discussion of the latter, see Wilhelm Halbfass (1992).

Through the disturbability of inexplicit familiarity, what is being encountered is there in its *unpredictability*, its *incalculability*" (1999: 77).[17]

While Heidegger writes in *Being and Time* that there is a Christian element that has to be eradicated from Greek thought, he nevertheless employs early in his career a particularly Christian element. Mehta, in fact, shows how this latent Christian element *provides the impetus* for Heidegger's emphasis on time and his privileging of the future.

> In his 1920-21 lecture course entitled "Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion", Heidegger dealt with the 'factual life-experience' that finds expression in the *Epistles* of Saint Paul. In the *Epistle* to the Thessalonians Paul speaks about the hope of Christ's return… 'It is not necessary… to say anything about the time and the hour: for you yourselves know… that the day of the Lord shall come like a thief in the night.' 'Suddenness' is the main quality of the future, which is kairological rather than chronological. The *kairos* is the razor's edge of decision, beyond all reckoning and mastery of time, an aspect of life as lived-through, *a movement that cannot be objectified*, not a happening describable in terms of its contents, of the *what* of that happening but as *a movement towards a future which is not at our disposal and cannot be grasped by chronological reckoning*. (LW 212; emphasis added)

While chronos signifies the contingent passing of episodic moments of time (for the chronicler, the moments of time do not point to any necessary interrelation), kairos, to the contrary, describes the moment of decision-in-time as determinative of the entire course of time.[18] That is to say, the moment of decision that is kairological renders meaningful that which had preceded it as well as that which will follow it. For Mehta, this lived-through moment of decision cannot be anticipated by, nor recuperated into, a metaphysical chronology. Each time decision befalls Dasein, it must grapple with the decision *as* decision, that is, as a movement of thought towards the future whose outcome is radically undetermined. For this reason, "In primary and authentic temporality the future possesses a pre-eminence" (PMH 278). The kairological moment is unanticipated and irrecoverable. It is singular; it is irrational.[19] Kairological time is uncertainty; kairological time is anxiety provoking. While Dasein's fundamental ontology implicates an irreducible structure of openness to the future, such an emphasis on the future ought not to keep us from noticing that

[17] Along these lines, Derrida also notes, "The chance of the future as chance itself. Future there is, if there ever is, when chance is no longer barred. There would be no future without chance" (1997: 50).

[18] Taylor notes in this regard, "'Chronos,' of course, means time. This word, however, carries with it a very specific interpretation of time. When viewed chronically, time appears to be serial succession. Instead of bearing a discernible interrelationship, temporal moments seem to be merely contingent and contiguous. Chronos is re-presented in a chronicle that 'simply' registers events in the order in which they appear to occur. No attempt is made to provide narrative coherence or to discover the rationale of the incidents listed" (1984: 62).

[19] I use "irrational" here to deploy its sense often used in mathematics: A number such as "pi" is irrational precisely to the extent that it betrays neither pattern nor repetition. Consider the definition of an irrational number from R. N. Aufman, V. C. Barker, and J. S. Lockwood, "The decimal representation of an irrational number never repeats or terminates and can only be approximated" (1999: G2).

Dasein's futural orientation is grounded in a past. In order for the future to retain its capacity for the unfamiliar and incalculable, Dasein must always already have a familiarity and calculability with the present, a present enabled by a past. The unfamiliar is the dialectical counter to the familiar.

### *3.2.3 Thrown-ness (Geworfenheit) and Guilt (Schuld)*

It is "essential" to Dasein's "structure" that among the many constituent elements one of them is "Being-in." Heidegger writes, "'Being-in' is thus the formal existential expression for the Being of Dasein, which has Being-in-the-world as its essential state" (BT 80). Contrary to Descartes' *res cogitans*, Dasein is never without its world. The 'Da' in Da-sein signifies this ever-present context, this inescapable *facticity* (and here we can recall from Chap. 2 Deussen's "da"). "Dasein is never 'proximally' an entity which is, so to speak, free from Being-in" (BT 84). Dasein's ontological constitution, our ontological constitution, for "Dasein is an entity which in each case I myself am" (BT 78) according to Heidegger, is such that it always and already has a *pre-reflective* commerce with the world. "It [Dasein] finds itself in its thrownness (*Geworfenheit*)" (BT 174).

When Heidegger speaks of Dasein's being-in *the world*, it is important to notice that he doesn't have in mind the "common" world of natural science. Rather, Dasein's world is full of the particular Dasein's particulars. Heidegger pointedly contrasts the scientific world denuded of historico-cultural nuance to the world of Dasein's tarrying:

> The purest everydayness can be called on: tarrying for a while at home, being-in-a-room, where eventually "a table" is encountered! … A thing in space – as a spatial thing, it is also a material thing. It has such and such a weight, such and such a color, such and such a shape…. However, when seen more closely, *the table is also something more*…. What is there in *the* room there at home is *the* table (not "a" table among many other tables in other rooms and houses) at which one sits *in order to* write, have a meal, sew, play…. [*S*]*uch is the primary way* in which it is being encountered in itself. (1999: 68–69)

Notice that Dasein's pre-reflective immersion in the world, for Heidegger, is exhaustively mediated, both historically and culturally. Dasein colors the world with its inherited concerns. This is Dasein's *facticity*. Mehta notes, "The 'facticity' of man consists in this that the possible ways in which he can understand himself and the world presuppose and are *limited by the actual historical situation* in which man at any time happens to be and the particular tradition he happens to inherit. *This is the meaning of the 'hermeneutics of facticity*" (PMH 24; emphasis added).

Man's concrete context ironically delimits his understanding of himself, not to mention his world. I say ironically because, and for Heidegger, the delimitation indicates a "something more." The table is not *merely* so many centimeters wide. The table *is more than* a mere object in space, *more than* a mere example of the *res extensa*. For Heidegger, there is indeed a difference between what he calls ready-to-hand and present-at-hand. Metaphysics tends to see what is merely present-at-hand

as fundamental, suggesting that any meaning that we attach to certain objects, for example, my room wherein I play with my daughter as opposed to the same room seen on the draftsman's table is secondary. Heidegger wants to invert this. He believes our meaningful commerce with the world is primordial and that only a privation of such engagement enables the scientific catalogue. The *being* of the room *is* co-implicated with the activities to which it is put. Thus, and prior to a reflective inventory of the world such as we might find in the natural sciences, Dasein is always already intimately involved in its world. "Being-in-the-world… amounts to a ***non-thematic*** *circumspective absorption in references or assignments* constitutive for the readiness-to-hand of a totality of equipment" (BT 107; emphasis and boldface added). Prior to the reflective gaze that *thematizes* things in their presence-to-hand, i.e., things merely present as examples of higher generalities, things in the world are already understood in their particular readiness-to-hand. This is to say that the world "out there" is first and foremost made up of the things that Dasein utilizes for some historico-cultural purpose, project, possibility, or other. "Meaning is an *existentiale* of Dasein, not a property attaching to entities, lying 'behind' them, or floating somewhere as an 'intermediate domain'" (BT 193). As a result, there is no blind encounter with the other (though the encounter with the Other must be blind – a significant twist to be dealt with in the following three chapters). Notice the implication: if the world is always already entangled in the projects of Dasein, Dasein is always already entangled in the world.

The hermeneutics of facticity deeply antagonizes the Cartesian philosophy of the subject. Dasein is not the ego opposite its world. "Dasein is not a 'thing' like a piece of wood nor such a thing as a plant – nor does it consist of experiences, and still less is it a subject (an ego) standing over against objects (which are not the ego)" (Heidegger 1999: 37). Moreover, contesting humanism's common presupposition, the subject is not radically autonomous. "Man does not decide whether and how beings appear, whether and how God and the gods or history and nature come forward into the clearing of Being, come to presence and depart" (Heidegger 1977b: 234). To this extent, Heidegger's existential analysis does violence to the position that too readily assumes a world-less subject and/or a subject-less world: "Existential analysis… constantly has the character of doing violence, whether to the claims of the everyday interpretation, or to its complacency and its tranquilized obviousness" (BT 359). In fact, and to the contrary, we cannot have one without the other. "If no *Dasein* exists, no world is 'there' either" (BT 417). Dasein *always* has *its* world, *its* "definite possibilities." "Possibility, as an *existentiale*, does not signify a free-floating potentiality-for-Being in the sense of the 'liberty of indifference' (*libertas indifferentiae*). In every case Dasein… has already got itself into definite possibilities" (BT 183).

Dasein's "da" entails that praxis antecedes theory. That is to say, theoretical reflection takes its point of departure from a world already ontologically tied to tasks and actions. Thus denying the primordiality of the presupposition-less subject or object, Heidegger argues that Dasein interacts with a meaningful world prior to engaging in an abstract, disinterested speculation on the nature of the thing-in-itself. "What is decisive in the 'emergence' of the theoretical attitude would then lie in the *disappearance* of *praxis*…. The ontological possibility of 'theory' will be due

to the *absence* of *praxis* – that is, to a *privation*" (BT 409; emphases added). Gadamer also locates a similar concern in rhetoric and hermeneutics: "In both rhetoric and hermeneutics… theory is subsequent to that out of which it is abstracted; that is, to praxis" (1976: 21).

Dasein thus *cares* about *its* world prior to reflective distancing. In fact, care (*Sorge*) is "a *fundamental phenomenon of the being-there of Dasein*" (Heidegger 1999: 80). To this extent, Dasein is its vested interest.[20] "If, in the ontology of Dasein, we 'take our departure' from a worldless 'I' in order to provide this 'I' with an Object and an ontologically baseless relation to that Object, then we have 'presupposed' not too much, but *too little*" (BT 363). In this regard, any "correspondence theory of truth" is manifestly false. Truth does not rest in the adequate representation of an objective world. Laboring under such presumptions, the subject can have a meaningful world only if it *arbitrarily* throws some meaning or value onto it. This is the nihilism of subjectivism. "That which is, as the objective, is swallowed up into the immanence of subjectivity. The horizon no longer emits light of itself. It is now nothing but the point-of-view posited in the value-positing of the will to power" (Heidegger 1977a: 107). For Heidegger, such a pretentious subjectivism overlooks one very telling trait – Dasein *is not* the author of its world.

As Dasein is primarily and ontologically futural, that is, anticipatory, the already-there, the having-been that enables Dasein to have a meaningful project, is something to which Dasein can only come back. If Dasein is concerned with a project, a futurity, then the out-of-which of the project itself is something it can only take responsibility for, can come back to. This is, to be sure, the implication of Heidegger's *Geworfenheit*, or *thrownness*. "As being, Dasein is something that has been thrown; it has been thrown into its 'there', but *not* of its own accord" (BT 329). Notice Heidegger's emphasis on the lack of agency on the part of Dasein in determining its "inheritance." So little is Dasein determined as some simple presence that, in each case,

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[20] Notice that Heidegger's position here, and in turn Mehta's as well, is equivocally pre-scientific. It is not pre-scientific in that his theories are disputed by advanced scientific researches. That is, Heidegger's philosophy presents not an earlier stage, now overcome, in the development of the scientific spirit. The romantic-pastoral flourishes notwithstanding, Heidegger's project is ontological. His position is consequently pre-scientific in the logical, formal sense. Before the object is *merely* an object for a thematic gaze, Dasein always already "understands" the object in a horizon of involvements and projects. Heidegger argues:

> Basic concepts determine the way in which we get an understanding beforehand of the area of subject-matter underlying all the objects a science takes as its theme, and all positive investigation is guided by this understanding. *Only after* the area itself has been explored beforehand in a corresponding manner do these concepts become genuinely demonstrated and 'grounded'. (BT 30, emphasis added)

The natural sciences are, to be sure, derivative. "To lay bare what is just present-at-hand and no more, cognition must first penetrate *beyond* what is ready-to-hand in our concern. *Readiness-to-hand* is the way in which entities as they are '*in themselves' are defined ontologico-categorially*" (BT 101; emphasis added).

Dasein is not only ahead of itself in projecting towards a future outcome, but it is also able to project such possibilities only by inheriting a historico-cultural world, a world significantly not of its determination.[21]

The totality of references, in which and out of which Dasein traffics in the world, is one that Dasein never rises above, nor logically precedes. This again is human facticity. Mehta writes, "his 'being-there' necessarily entails an element of 'facticity', which means that *the possible ways* in which he understands himself and his world *are conditioned by the concrete historical situation* in which he finds himself, *the tradition he inherits* or appropriates, *the language in which he thinks*. Man is 'thrown' into a pre-existing manner of thinking and speaking, experiencing and understanding what *is*" (TP 85; emphases added). Dasein, human being, is significantly not the master over its own being-in-the-world. "The futurity of Dasein – the basic character of projection that befits its temporality – is limited by its other basic determination," Gadamer remarks, "namely, its 'thrownness,' which not only specifies *the limits of sovereign self-possession* but also opens up and determines the positive possibilities that we are" (1976: 49, emphasis added). Through being thrown – and here the passive construction is significant – Dasein takes over, assumes what it did not author. "It lies in the intrinsic thrown-ness of man," writes Mehta, "that he must presuppose himself and his openness, and thus Truth, for there is no possibility of his ever choosing himself freely to come into existence or not" (PMH 220).

Heidegger demonstrates that anytime we encounter something we do so through a forestructure that always discloses the subject matter in one way rather than another. Accordingly, the *forestructure* accounts for our pre-reflective, and thus thrown, commerce with the world. For Heidegger, interpretation is the activity that makes explicit what the forestructure renders implicit. Heidegger writes:

> In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw 'signification' over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by the interpretation. (BT 191)

Heidegger, and as we will see Gadamer and Mehta as well, insists on interpretation precisely because it is interpretation that takes into account that which is already there: interpretation, in order to be interpretation, does not interpret *ex nihilo*. Interpretation is thus a chore only for a thrown being. Dasein interprets precisely because it always already has some subject matter to read *as* some thing. "The 'as'," writes Heidegger, "makes up the structure of the explicitness of something that is understood. It constitutes the interpretation" (BT 189). According to Heidegger, there are two modes of this interpretive "as": "existential-*hermeneutical*" and "*apophantical*" (BT 201). The latter is the sense of the 'as' that renders things in the world *as* merely present-at-hand: the thematic gaze reduces the object to the status of the

[21] John D. Caputo explains in this regard, "The Being of Dasein is constantly projected ahead, never in a free-floating and absolute way, but always toward possibilities into which it has all along been inserted" (1987: 60).

"universal-instantiated." Such a reduction of the object to the universal (a procedure followed by the natural sciences to be sure) favors the appeal to the synchronic and universal. Thematic interpretation privileges the predicative assertion. "Something *ready-to-hand with which* we have to do or perform something, turns into something '*about which*' the assertion that points it out is made" (BT 200). To the "apophanitcal 'as'," Heidegger prefers the "existential-hermeneutical 'as'" that preserves the primordially involved aspect of the thing under consideration. "Interpretation is carried out primordially," argues Heidegger, "not in a theoretical statement but in an action of circumspective concern – laying aside the unsuitable tool, or exchanging it, 'without wasting words'. From the fact that words are absent, it may not be concluded that interpretation is absent" (BT 200).

That Dasein always already *has* something to interpret regardless of being thematically aware of this "possession" indicates the extent to which Dasein is in fact submerged in the world of references and assignments. Here Heidegger points to his "fore-structures," that is, the structures that account for the fact that Dasein understands pre-thematically/pre-reflectively. "In every case this interpretation is grounded in *something we have in advance* – in a *fore-having*" (BT 191). Dasein initiates an appropriation of this "fore-having" through interpretation, but, since Dasein is always already in the world, its point of departure for such an interpretation must *a priori* begin from a particular point-of-view. As the totality of references that is Dasein's world logically precedes any one particular project of Dasein, Dasein necessarily falls short of a total re-appropriation of the environing world into which it has been thrown. Thus the particular point of departure for Dasein's interpretation of its fore-having is its *fore-sight*. Heidegger writes:

> When something is understood but is still veiled, it becomes unveiled by an act of appropriation, and this is always done under the guidance of a point of view, which fixes that with regard to which what is understood is to be interpreted. In every case interpretation is grounded in *something we see in advance* – in a *fore-sight*. This fore-sight 'takes the first cut' out of what has been taken into our fore-having. (BT 191)

But, and lest we suggest that this fore-sight is some pure, neutral gaze, we must recognize that the fore-sight is always given to one expectation of meaning rather than another. Heidegger proposes that the project of interpretation thus involves a conceptualization prior to the explicit act of interpretation as such. That is to say, Dasein has always already decided to conceptualize the subject matter in one way rather than another.

> In such an interpretation, the way in which the entity we are interpreting is to be conceived can be drawn from the entity itself, or the interpretation can force the entity into concepts to which it is opposed in its manner of Being. In either case, the interpretation has already decided for a definite way of conceiving it, either with finality or with reservations; it is grounded in *something we grasp in advance* – in a *fore-conception*. (BT 191)

The fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception make up the fore-structure of Dasein's thrown commerce with the world. "All understanding has this 'pre-structure'" adds Mehta, "in consequence of which the interpretation of something as something is basically and *a priori* grounded in the pre-possession or prior intention, the

pre-view, the sight which we bring with us, and the pre-conception or anticipation with which we inescapably confront a text" (UT 153). Accordingly, there is no such thing as a presupposition-less interpretation. The putatively innocuous appeal to what is "out there" perpetuates nothing other than the unexamined presupposition of the subject. "'What stands there' in the first instance," writes Heidegger, "is nothing other than the obvious undiscussed assumption of the person who does the interpreting" (BT 192). Indeed, "an interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us" (BT 191-192).[22]

The foregoing discussion of the "fore-structure" suggests that wedded to Dasein is a certain passivity. As previously indicated, Dasein does not author its world; otherwise it would not be thrown. "As being, Dasein is something that has been brought into its 'there', but *not* of its own accord" (BT 329). Such passivity entails a nullity. That is to say, at Dasein's "foundation" rests an exclusion that, in its turn, is responsible not only for Dasein's world but for its *guilt* (*Schuld*) as well, summoning Dasein back to its facticity. "The call of conscience has the character of an *appeal* to Dasein by calling it to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self; and this is done by way of *summoning* it to its ownmost Being-guilty" (BT 314). "Being-guilty"? Why is Dasein *guilty*? Dasein is guilty precisely because it harbors a "not." It is always already in one world rather than another: Dasein is in *its* world. "Thrown into its 'there', every Dasein has been factically submitted to a definite 'world' – its 'world'" (BT 344). By being in its world, Dasein cannot be in another world, and this exclusion is a 'not', a nullity, for which Dasein must take responsibility. Guilt is the condition of Dasein's incompletion; responsibility is Dasein's response to its being guilty. "In the idea of 'Guilty' there lies the character of the '*not*'" (BT 329). This antecedent "not" is simultaneously restrictive and productive. Mehta explains, "Man exists as his ground by projecting himself into possibilities, but his projects are, ontologically speaking, doubly infected with nullity, firstly, because they are always thrown projects, thus incorporating the nullity in his way of being his ground, and secondly, because in choosing one possibility he is not able to realize another" (PMH 251). To this extent, Dasein's agency is structurally limited. Dasein's possibilities depend upon the exclusion of other possibilities. Dasein cannot do everything at once; Dasein cannot know everything at once.[23]

Heidegger argues that Dasein, in order to be authentic, in order for it to know itself in its truth, must take responsibility for the negation that is simultaneously productive and restrictive of the world into which it is thrown. "We define the formally existential idea of the 'Guilty'," Heidegger writes, "as 'Being-the-basis for a Being which has been defined by a 'not' – that is to say, as '*Being-the-basis of a*

[22] To this, Caputo adds, "There are no pure, uninterpreted facts of the matter but only beings already set forth in a certain frame, projected in their proper Being" (1987: 61).

[23] Rorty adds, "To be primordial is thus to have the ability to know that when you seize upon an understanding of Being, when you build a house for Being by speaking a language, you are automatically giving up a lot of other possible understandings of Being, and leaving a lot of differently designed houses unbuilt" (1991: 46).

*nullity* (nothingness)" (BT 329). Dasein is this basis; Dasein is incomplete. "The moment man 'exists' in such a way that nothing more remains outstanding, he ceases to exist as Dasein," Mehta argues, "So long as he *is* he *never attains wholeness* and when he does possess it, the gain turns into sheer loss of being-in-the-world" (PMH 226; emphasis added). For Heidegger and Mehta, Dasein *is* what *fails* to achieve completion, full presence, and thus *is not* in the metaphysical sense. Because of a limited inheritance and because of a futural projection, Dasein is not some thing in time; rather it is temporality. In order to be in the world, Dasein must remain incomplete, that is, without essence. Dasein exists through its "not yet," the ontological condition of its possibilities. I propose that it is this structural incompletion found in Dasein that ultimately influences the way Mehta reads the Hindu tradition, and in particular, the tradition of *viraha bhakti* (see Chap. 6). Mehta notes, "Dasein is infected with an ever present incompleteness, which cannot be annulled and which finds its end in death…. The not-yet of Dasein… is not merely not accessible to experience but is itself non-existent and refers to something that Dasein, lacking it, has to become" (PMH 229). Each Dasein is thrown towards its own outstanding yet immanent death. For this reason, Dasein is always a concerned incompletion. It never gets back behind its exclusionary thrownness for it *is* the not that ultimately enables Dasein to be Dasein. The nothing is thus equiprimordial with Dasein's being. "'Being-a-basis'," writes Heidegger, "means *never* to have power over one's ownmost Being from the ground up. This '*not*' belongs to the existential meaning of 'thrownness.'" "The Self," he continues, "…can *never* get that basis into its power" (BT 330). Dasein never achieves full mastery over itself. Dasein is structurally incomplete and, consequently, finite. The full, metaphysical plenitude of Being formally eludes Dasein. Insofar as Dasein is temporality and as such the primordial basis for all other ontological conceptualizations, the metaphysics of presence is constructed and secondary. While Heidegger details the fundamental ontology of Dasein's facticity, it is his pupil, Hans-Georg Gadamer, who eventually directs this discussion towards concrete historical traditions and communities, concerns central to Mehta's work.

## 3.3 Gadamer and Philosophical Hermeneutics

Gadamer's thought, like Heidegger's, spans a range of topics, some of which are less helpful for our present concerns than others. Therefore, I will again delimit the examination and not attempt an exhaustive treatment of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Rather, I treat only those themes that appear most useful as a preparation for Mehta's concerns. The themes I examine here are prejudice, provocation, and "fusion of horizons."

### *3.3.1 Prejudice*

Dasein is thrown into its world; it is an heir to the tradition into which it is inserted. Accordingly, Gadamer argues that the critique of prejudice inherited from the Enlightenment is itself a prejudice to be critiqued. Contrary to the Enlightenment's appeal to universals, its disdain for the provincial, Gadamer provocatively contends that we cannot escape being prejudiced. The Enlightenment's position, "determined [as it is] by the rationalistic ideal of a total and supra-historical conceptual transparency," falls short of its posited goal. We must, therefore, reevaluate prejudice's structure. Here we see the proximity of Gadamer's work to that of Heidegger. For both, the subject/Dasein is thrown into a factical situation out of which it must form and project its possibilities. In this regard, Dasein does not draw its possibilities from an infinite source. Dasein, or for Gadamer, the self thrown into a particular situation, has its possibilities limited *a priori*. Such limitation depends not only on Dasein's "formal guilt," but also, and most importantly for Gadamer and Mehta, on the historico-cultural tradition into which the self is inserted. Gadamer writes, "*Long before* we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, *we understand ourselves in a **self-evident** way in the family, society, and state* in which we live" (TM 276; emphases and boldface added). Here Gadamer makes the explicit turn towards historical communities. To be sure, though *Being and Time* delineates Dasein's ontological structures and ultimately structural incompletion, it nevertheless withholds a discussion of actual historical traditions. Along these lines, Hubert Dreyfus points out that Heidegger "does not discuss what it means to be a human being in specific cultures or historical periods, but rather attempts by describing everyday life to lay out for us the general, cross-cultural, transhistorical structures of our self-interpreting way of being and how these structures account for all modes of intelligibility" (1991: 35).

For Gadamer, as for Mehta, it is precisely the existence within "specific cultures or historical periods" that is most significant. Recall, Mehta notes, "The 'facticity' of man consists in this that the possible ways in which he can understand himself and the world presuppose, and are limited by, the actual historical situation in which man at any time happens to be and the particular tradition he happens to inherit" (HD 41).[24] Just as Heidegger argues that Dasein is thrown into a particular, factical world, so too for Gadamer and Mehta, the self is first and foremost thrown into a

[24] In this regard, we can sense a certain convergence with the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu: "The principles embodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness… nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, and, therefore, more precious, than the values given body, *made* body by the transubstantiation achieved by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy, capable of instilling a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy, through injunctions as insignificant as 'stand up straight'…. [T]he habitus is an endless capacity to engender products… whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production" (1977: 94–95).

particular "family, society, and state." We are vernacularly. "No thinker, however original he may be," Mehta contends, "can lift himself out of the tradition that sustains him and from which the driving power and the manner of his questioning is derived" (PMH 390). Being-guilty thus means having been in-formed by one's vernacular inheritance. As opposed to the illusion of universal being, vernacular being is prejudiced being. Mehta observes:

> We are always born within an ongoing tradition and seek to comprehend it by our own projects of understanding, which are as much rooted in that tradition as they modify it in the course of understanding it by translating it in terms of our present life-situation. It is this aspect of Heidegger's thought which Hans-Georg Gadamer has elaborated in his massive work on philosophical hermeneutics and which seems to me of *central importance in any inquiry into the religious dimensions of different life-worlds*, including one's own. (LW 215; emphasis added)

For Gadamer and Mehta, prejudice is not an unfortunate myopia remedied by more so-called tolerant perspectives. Rather, prejudice is an ontological dimension of who we are. We always already read into the other our provincial anticipations. "This circle of understanding," writes Gadamer, "is not a 'methodological' circle, but describes *an element of the ontological structure of understanding*" (TM 293; emphasis added). Mehta adds:

> The circle of understanding is thus not at all a "methodological" circle but refers to an ontological property of the structure of understanding itself, such that to understand is always to be involved in the unending interplay of the whole which is tradition, and the part, which consists of the unconscious presuppositions with which the interpreter approaches it. There is no understanding which is presuppositionless and the anticipation of sense which governs our understanding of a text is not, as Gadamer says, an act executed by us as subjects, *is not the act of our subjectivity*, but is rather an ingression into the process of tradition in which the past and the present are continuously mediated. (UT 154; emphasis added)

While Heidegger was interested in the guilt of Dasein, we now notice that ontological prejudice actually exculpates the subject from his ostensible narcissistic prejudice. In other words, ontological prejudice displaces the autonomy of the subject. Countering in this way the Cartesian legacy that is Sartrean existentialism, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Mehta attest to the fact that the subject never freely chooses itself nor its concerns. It "is not the act of our subjectivity." Gadamer's argument in this way rests upon the notion of a primordial prejudice, a "veiled prejudice," that can be a prejudice only because it first and foremost anticipates one meaning to the exclusion of another. Prejudice as such never encompasses the whole. As Mehta explicitly argues, our anticipations are not reducible to the free intentions of our subjective agency.

We are now coming to an understanding of Mehta's motivation for studying Heidegger and Gadamer. While allegedly presenting him with "gnomic and strange utterances," Mehta's interest in these philosophers reflects his postcolonial concern for enabling an equitable inquiry into, as well as maintenance of, "different life-worlds." For Mehta, the cultural other is preliminarily approached from a context alien to its own. "He who seeks to understand, his tradition or that of other cultures, can do so only from his own particular standpoint; his 'prejudices' not only restrict

his vision but enable it" (PIU 131). In this regard, the inquirer never occupies a historico-cultural neutrality (a topic to which I return in the next chapter). Considered on a political register, the Western self cannot help but approach the East through categories forged in the West. That the self inhabits a delimited horizon always and already entails that "the initial meaning (of a text or interlocutor) emerges only because he is reading the text (or listening to the other's utterance) with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning," attests Gadamer, "Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there" (TM 267). While Gadamer speaks of understanding "what is there," he does not have in mind, to be sure, the recognition of some principal *arché*, or *ousia*. Gadamer's position, in fact, precedes discussions of the Being of beings. He writes, "Our verbal experience of the world is prior to everything that is recognized and addressed as existing" (TM 450). Elsewhere he notes, "The language that things have… is not the logos ousias" (TM 476). "The language that things have" does not involve universal and synchronic predication. Rather, the language that things have reflects their embedded-ness in historico-cultural nuance.

Language is prejudice. Language enables the self to be not in *the* world but in *its* world. "Language," Gadamer argues, "is not just one of man's possessions in the world; rather, on it depends the fact that man has a *world* at all" (TM 443). Gadamer, following Heidegger's pronouncement that "Language is the house of Being," contends, "*Being that can be understood is language*" (TM 474). It is most important to understand what Gadamer proposes here. Gadamer's efforts to distance his understanding of language from the "instrumentalist theory of signs" demonstrate his interest in a more fundamental role for language. In other words, an interpretation of language that would "start from the existence and instrumentality of words, and regard the subject matter as something we know about previously from an independent source… thus… start[s] too late" (TM 406). While Gadamer chooses to refer to such a position as an "instrumentalist theory of signs," there are other appellations, one of which is certainly the "correspondence theory of truth," an appellation whose genealogy traces back to the scholastic notion of *adequatio intellectus et rei*, that is, the adequate correspondence of what we know with what exists mind-independently. To be sure, the "instrumentalist theory of signs" suggests that words are the tags we use to indicate the things we encounter pre-linguistically. Explicitly contesting such an interpretation, Gadamer contends, "that which comes into language is not something pre-given before language; rather, the word gives it its own determinateness" (TM 475). Thus it is through language that anything and everything has its prejudiced being. "We are already biased in our thinking and knowing by our linguistic interpretation of the world," claims Gadamer, "To grow up into this linguistic interpretation means to grow up in the world. To this extent, language is the real mark of our finitude. It is always out beyond us" (1976: 64).

The question that of course arises at this point is whether or not there is a universal, culture-free language. Perhaps vernacular languages are imperfect instantiations of "the" universal logos. If we distill cultural idiom, would we not end up with some trans-cultural language? Gadamer, recognizing that language is indeed the condition

upon which the world depends, significantly contends that there is no such universal language: "Verbal form and traditionary content cannot be separated in the hermeneutic experience" (TM 441). In other words, while we may be able to study the formal relationships between parts of language, language itself is never divorced from a certain positive content handed down by tradition. Concurring, Mehta writes, "There is no such thing as *the* language, but only particular languages, into which particular peoples and races are born, in which they are nurtured and have their dwelling. Language is essentially mother-tongue, dialect, the language of home and, so regarded, itself a home for man" (PMH 501).[25] Mother-tongue is prejudice; there is no father-tongue. The only universal language we can attain is in effect a misrecognized vernacular language enjoying cross-cultural privilege. If traditionary content tied to a vernacular language affords us our world, then to what extent are there different worlds because there *are* different languages? Mehta rhetorically questions, "If language is the house in which man lives in the neighborhood of Being, as Heidegger has said, does the European inhabit quite a different house than the Asian?" (HCIW 14) Elsewhere, he writes, "The language in which one thinks is not merely the means by which one expresses one's thought. Language is the vehicle of all that has been thought before in the history of that language. The footprints of previous ideas are never totally erased" (PP 251).

Philosophical hermeneutics discloses here its ironic universal import. Employing unmistakably transcendental philosophical language such as "condition of its possibility," Gadamer argues that the hermeneutical situation is not merely restricted to the *Geisteswissenschaften* (i.e., "human sciences"); rather, the hermeneutical situation encompasses all domains and disciplines. "Hermeneutics is… a universal aspect of philosophy, and not just the methodological basis of the so-called human sciences" (TM 476). This unflinchingly contests the self-understanding of the *Naturwissenschaften*. Ironically, this universal condition turns out to be the "condition of impossibility" of reaching a positive universal. Vernacular prejudice is the universal condition that precludes reaching a universal position devoid of vernacular prejudice. If traditional prejudice is ontological, as Heidegger, Gadamer, and Mehta attest, can we ever hope to overcome our inheritance? Is the transcendence of self an illusion?

### *3.3.2 Provocation*

While Descartes's methodological doubt is often considered the precursor of modern philosophy, we nevertheless look to Kant for the Enlightenment's grand

[25] We find similar statements in both Heidegger and Rorty. Heidegger notes, "There is no such thing as a natural language that would be the language of a human nature occurring of itself, without a destiny. All language is historical," (1971: 133). Rorty adds, "There is no nonlinguistic access to Being" (1991: 37).

injunction – "*Sapere aude*!" (Dare to know!)[26] With these words, Kant challenges the individual to slough off his chains to traditional authority, to know truth for himself and by himself. To this extent, Kant invites the individual to become the author of his own knowledge. Yet according to Gadamer and Mehta, tradition's prejudice ontologically enables the subject's knowledge in the first place. And as we just witnessed, it would appear that our prejudiced interpretation of the world results from a vernacular inheritance: the self's existence and *its* world are *always* partially determined by tradition.

I say "partially" here not in order to preserve the sense that the self can in some way escape its traditions *tout court*, thereby endorsing the Enlightenment's position; rather, the self is "partially" determined because traditions are never static, but always dynamic. In this sense, the self and its traditions are neither solipsistic nor exhaustively determined. Dasein is Dasein precisely to the extent to which it still has an outstanding task: "Dasein is infected with an ever present incompleteness, which cannot be annulled and which finds its end in death" (PMH 229). If Dasein is coterminous with its world, and by extension, its traditions, and as such structurally shares its incompletion, then tradition is also constantly and ontologically open to alteration and, perhaps, the aleatory. As much as it may run counter to certain understandings of "tradition" as that which maintains itself in its selfsameness (a conservative point of view, to be sure), tradition, for both Gadamer and Mehta, is in constant flux. "The person who is situated and acts in history continually experiences the fact that nothing returns" (TM 357). (Here of course we can recall our earlier discussion of the "irrational.") Never fully present to begin with, tradition cannot be isomorphically repeated. "Inasmuch as the tradition is newly expressed in language, something comes into being that had not existed before and that exists from now on" (TM 462). A question, nevertheless, remains: how does prejudice produce the new? After all, Heidegger claims that it is the undiscussed assumptions/prejudices of the one doing the interpreting that is first uncovered.

Recognizing our ontological finitude, our ontological prejudice, approximates only half of the "hermeneutic lesson." "The consciousness of being conditioned does not supersede our conditionedness" (TM 448). This is the other half. Hermeneutics presents an unequivocal threat to the Enlightenment's project. Merely acknowledging prejudice in no way leads to the subject's emancipation. In fact, Gadamer writes, "the prejudices and fore-meanings that occupy the interpreter's consciousness *are not at his free disposal*" (TM 295; emphasis added). Gadamer provocatively suggests here that the conscious intention of the interpreter (author?) is not always the decisive motivation. The interpreter is driven by hidden prejudice. "The illumination of this situation – reflection on effective history – can never be completely achieved," writes Gadamer, "yet the fact that it cannot be completed is due not to a deficiency

[26] Kant writes in the introductory paragraph to "What is Enlightenment?": "Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another" (1986: 263).

in reflection but to the essence of historical being that we are. To be historically means that *knowledge of oneself can never be complete*" (TM 302; emphasis added). For Gadamer, as for Mehta, the self is so thrown into its particular situations and traditions that often the particularity passes for the self-evident; yet the self-evident points not to something that stands for all time in itself as truth, but rather to the undiscussed prejudices of the empirical subject. In fact, Gadamer contends, deploying a metaphor of despotism, "it is the *tyranny of hidden prejudice* that makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition" (TM 270; emphasis added).

Now, if, as Gadamer maintains, prejudices are hidden from the reflective gaze of the subject to the extent that prejudices actually tyrannize the subject, then how precisely do we ever come to know that we are prejudiced? How do we become aware of, and subsequently overcome, the "tyranny of hidden prejudice"? Can *we* illuminate the dark recesses that are hidden prejudices? Openly contesting Kant's declaration that Enlightenment is the reliance upon oneself, Gadamer suggests that *we* are impotent in this regard. Inverting the Enlightenment's injunction, Gadamer challenges us to rely upon *the other* to aid us in our overcoming of prejudice. *We cannot become aware of our prejudices without the other*. "It is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but *only when it is*, so to speak, *provoked*" (TM 299; emphasis added). Notice yet again the significant use of the passive construction: the passive construction displaces the agency of provocation from the self onto the other. The self becomes aware of its prejudices only when *it* is provoked. Would we not be led to expect this, considering Heidegger's statement that often it is the unspoken prejudice of the interpreter that is understood when an appeal is made to what simply stands there in the present? Accordingly, "Our own prejudice," Gadamer argues, "is properly brought into play by being put at risk" (TM 299).

A hidden prejudice can be put at risk only when *the other* provokes it; otherwise, and to be sure, the prejudice would not be hidden. Both Gadamer and Mehta propose that it is only when the self comes up against the antagonistic, an antagonism that provokes it, that challenges it, puts it at risk, that hidden prejudices come out into the open. Gadamer writes, "Every experience worthy of the name *thwarts an expectation*. Thus the historical nature of man essentially implies *a fundamental negativity* that emerges in the relation between experience and insight" (TM 356; emphasis added). The self cannot properly anticipate/intend its own provocation. In the experience that runs counter to its project, the self confronts its own negation, its finitude and hidden prejudices, and thus gains a novel insight into the subject matter. "Only our openness for what the other says and our willingness to listen to him," argues Mehta, "can guarantee that the encounter will lead us to an awareness of these preconceptions" (PIU 130). Experience in this regard rests in that which forces the self, Dasein, to redirect its project, to redirect its forestructure. Notice that, according to this logic, the self is not solely responsible for the event of understanding: the self is decentered. The self relies on that which escapes its anticipatory forestructure. "A genuine conversation," Gadamer writes, "is never the one that we

want to conduct" (TM 383).[27] The source of antagonism, provocation, and thus experience, always rests with the encounter with the other.

Significantly, Mehta suggests that it is through the *cross-cultural encounter* that we in fact find this type of "totalizing challenge" to our prejudices. Indeed, "Ur-prejudices," so to speak, belong to one's cultural tradition, to one's mother tongue, to one's "family, society, and state."

> *The attempt to understand the other thus brings me up against another total cultural horizon* which I seek to enter on the basis of my own historically constituted horizon. Whether it is the forgotten past of my own traditional heritage or the otherness of a different religious tradition, in each case I am thrown back upon myself, to a reexamination of my own preconceptions, *to an awareness of my own prejudices and their restrictive influence on my thinking*. (PU 268; emphases added)

Notice that Mehta, while certainly deploying the language of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, nevertheless refers here to prejudices' "restrictive influence" rather than their enabling capacity for understanding. Ultimately arguing that the dominant cross-cultural dialogue of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries privileges the West (a topic dealt with at length in the next chapter), Mehta, in contrast to Gadamer, chooses here to emphasize restriction. That being said, for both Gadamer and Mehta, novelty depends on "restrictive influence." Meanings that emerge in the dialogical encounter *are* new, and are not mere potencies coming to actualization, the latter being clearly consonant with a traditional Western metaphysics. "In genuine dialogue," argues Gadamer, "*something emerges that is contained in neither of the partners by himself*" (TM 462; emphasis added). Novelty thus lies outside of any finite Dasein's forestructure; the novel is thus the impossible.[28] To this extent, novelty explodes calculus: what emerges from the play of genuine dialogue could not have been forestructured by either interlocutor.

Provocation and risk, and thus the displacement of agential subjectivity, go hand in hand with Gadamer's concept of play. When two parties join in a true dialogue, the subject matter itself (*die Sache selbst*) takes over and plays the players. That is to say, when joining in dialogue, interlocutors forego the imposition of their limited

[27] I propose that we see here an anticipation of Jacques Derrida's comments concerning the "invention of the other." Derrida writes, "The invention of the other is not opposed to that of the same, its difference beckons toward another coming about, toward this other invention of which we dream, the invention of the entirely other, the one that allows the coming of a still unanticipatable alterity and for which no horizon of waiting as yet seems ready, in place, available" (1989: 55).

[28] On the impossible as that which is perceived from the hither side of experience, that is to say, from the point of view of the anticipatory structures of Dasein prior to entering into the dialogic situation, Derrida writes: "The other is not the possible. So it would be necessary to say that the only possible invention would be the invention of the impossible. But an invention of the impossible is impossible, the other would say. Indeed. But it is the only possible invention: an invention has to declare itself to be the invention of that which did not appear to be possible; otherwise it only makes explicit a program of possibilities within the economy of the same" (1989: 60). Here we of course see an analogous position with that taken by Gadamer vis-à-vis his reflections on the new as that which goes beyond what an infinite mind will have always already realized in an eternal present.

understanding in favor of an *expansion* of understanding afforded by that which emerges in the to and fro of conversation. "The structure of play," Gadamer notes, "absorbs the player into itself, and thus frees him of *the burden of taking initiative*, which constitutes the actual strain of existence" (TM 105; emphasis added). Provocative play displaces the agency of the self. The self is played by the play, played by the emergent subject matter. "All playing is a being-played" (TM 106). Such play precedes metaphysical presence; but, this is not to say that Gadamer endorses the Derridean dismissal of presence that has become so popular in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Both Gadamer and Derrida speak of play, but the outcome of their reflections point in different directions. While Gadamer's play leads to an emergent subject matter that the two parties positively share, for Derrida (and many other postmodern authors) play effaces the subject matter in favor of an absence that renders positive meaning ephemeral. Derrida notes in this regard:

> Play is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Play is always play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence. Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around. (1978: 292).

For Derrida, the metaphysics of presence is the effect of play and not the ground over which things play. All the same, for Gadamer, both players, and here we could suggest the subject and tradition, are played, and in the process something that had not existed before for either one comes forth. While Gadamer is concerned with positive historical content, it would seem that Derrida, like Heidegger in a way, is concerned with a transcendental condition that entails a lack of positive content.[29] On this point, Mehta would seem to be closer to Gadamer. He writes:

> In a dialogue, each speaker plays a language-game of his own to begin with and the authenticity of the dialogue depends upon the extent to which they gradually surrender themselves to the sway of a language-game that encompasses them both and which is not identical with either of their separate games – and thus in the end let… a new horizon of meaning and a new truth that was not in the possession of either before. (UT 157)

Of importance here for what follows is that Mehta seemingly invites a reflection on the ethics of philosophical hermeneutics. He suggests that an acquiescence to

[29] James Risser has addressed this very issue in his *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics*. He writes, "Writing changes everything once it is apparent that there is a movement of *différance* in language that institutes the system of language itself. For Derrida, then, a certain kind of writing, which is not opposed to speaking, precedes the voice and disseminates it. This Socratic gesture of holding the determination of meaning open before the reader through a strategy that seeks to disseminate the economy of the text is what ultimately separates Derrida from Gadamer. In Derrida's eyes, there is for Gadamer's hermeneutics no literal writing, that is, no writing that is 'external to the spirit, to breath, to speech, and to the logos,' which would disrupt the logos, halt the breath. Gadamer wants to maintain the difference, in other words, between the letter and the spirit of the text, where the concern is always for what is of spirit" (1997: 183).

play, to the other, is appropriate for true dialogue. Dialogue depends upon the suspension of any one interlocutor's will-to-power. Structurally speaking, we can envision a dialogue wherein two parties do not challenge each other at all, that is, one merely corroborates the other.[30] Then there are of course situations where one party reduces the other party's position. It is this possibility that begs the ethical question. Gadamer provocatively locates this latter tendency in the scientific method. That is to say, the scientific approach is given to domination, and as such, is unethical. "The knowledge of all natural sciences is 'knowledge for domination'" (TM 451). Science, for Gadamer (and perhaps for most scientists), is most certainly not a playful enterprise. Never the passive agent in a risky dialogical play, the (normal) scientist always takes the initiative. "Each science, as a science," Gadamer argues, "has in advance projected a field of objects such that to know them is to govern them" (TM 452). Gadamer extends this concern not only to the *Naturwissenschaften*, but also to the *Geisteswissenschaften* as well. Prematurely allowing its cooptation by the natural scientific paradigm, the project in the human sciences is often guided by a methodological zeal for objectivity. "Acknowledging the Other in this way, making him the object of objective knowledge, involves the fundamental suspension of his claim to truth" (TM 303-304). And there's the rub. According to Gadamer, the methodological encounter with the other reduces the other to an object susceptible

[30] For an example of this type of dialogue wherein the deep logic remains intact we can look to Ronald Inden's argument in his "Orientalist Constructions of India" (1986). There Inden delineates two positions taken by scholars with respect to the ethnographic material emerging from Indological studies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Inden argues that the "episteme" that enables Indology must be deconstructed. "My concern in the 'deconstruction' that follows is not to compare the 'theories' or 'explanations' of these accounts with the 'facts' of Indian history. On the contrary, I take the position that those facts themselves have been produced by an 'episteme' (a way of knowing that implies a particular view of existence) which I wish to criticize. The episteme at issue presupposes a representational view of knowledge" (401). Here of course Inden is referring to what both Heidegger and Gadamer problematize as seen above concerning the "correspondence theory of truth." In Inden's own words, this episteme is one that "assumes that true knowledge merely represents or mirrors a separate reality which the knower somehow transcends." (401–402) Inden feels that there are two assumptions built into this episteme and it is precisely these assumptions (can we say prejudices?) that remain in tact even when there appears to be two opposing positions. He writes, "Two of the assumptions built into the 'episteme' of Indology are that the real world (whether this is material and determinate or ideal and ineffable) consists of essences and that that world is unitary." (402) This leads the Orientalist, who of course takes his own standards of reason and judgment to be normative, so Inden argues, to explain away difference in the name of a more original unity. Our interest here is that Inden suggests that the positivist/rationalist (he who feels that everything is ultimately material and determinate) and his "loyal opposition" – the Romantic (he who feels that everything is ultimately ideal and ineffable) – corroborate a deep logic that is complicit with colonial agendas. Neither of the positions questions the episteme as such, and thereby the romantic doesn't displace the deep logic even though he apparently sympathizes, if not endorses, what he takes to be an oppressed and indigenous voice. "The romantic disagrees with the positivist or materialist in seeing human life shaped in the last instance by a reality that is *external* to it. He argues instead that it is shaped by a reality that is *internal. Since, however, the internal reality, human nature, the human spirit, psyche, or mind is* ***unitary****, is everywhere and always the same, the positions of the two are not so different*." (434; emphasis added) Again the deep logic of difference-as-a-privation-of-identity plays itself out.

to objective knowledge, thereby emasculating the other, ignoring the other's claim to truth. If the self fails to acknowledge the other's claim, then the self simply repeats its own prejudices: its hidden prejudices go undisclosed. The self sees only itself in the other either by a reduction of other to self, or by negating the other as a simple opposite of self.

An ethical relationship to the other, a relationship that preserves the other's claim to truth, provides the necessary provocation to overcome the tyranny of hidden prejudice. This is a curious ethics. Here the ethical relationship to the other, through a letting-be, inverts itself and becomes, ironically, an economic relationship that benefits the self. Gadamer's hermeneutics turns the ethical concern for the other, an asymmetrical relation outside of economy, into an emancipatory potlatch. By giving the other its freedom to be other by subordinating its own claims to truth, the self, in return, is given its freedom from hidden prejudice due to the provocation that is the other as other. Philosophical hermeneutics thus reveals that one interlocutor depends upon an ethical relation to the other for *its own* freedom: the benevolent comportment of the ethical relation to the other returns in the form of emancipation of the self from the tyranny of its hidden prejudice. Accordingly, the self must undergo an experience in which its own position suffers alteration. There is freedom in suffering. To these ends, freedom is paradoxically not the mastery of the other through the free imposition of one's own will, but rather the capacity to be receptive to the other's truth claim. "Openness to the other, then, involves recognizing that I myself must accept that which is against me, even though no one else forces me to do so" (TM 361). The self thus gains freedom from prejudices only by allowing the other to be other, and thereby provoking and challenging. When both dialogue partners are mutually challenging, they allow themselves to be taken up into the play, ultimately sharing in a common task and meaning. Dialogue partners, according to Gadamer, come to share a common horizon.

### *3.3.3 The Fusion of Horizons*

Finite by nature, the self encounters the other that provokes. When both parties provoke each other, a genuine, and thus playful, dialogue ensues, and the original horizons come to share something novel in their mutuality. "True dialogue," Mehta writes, "is less a telling each other than a questioning of each other and it never leaves us where we were before, either in respect of our understanding of the other or of ourselves" (PIU 122). Neither interlocutor, to this extent, can be in total control of a dialogue: neither can anticipate the conversation that actually unfolds. Such unpredictability is precisely what leads to the expansion of each one's horizon. Mehta notes:

> This to and fro movement between myself and the other, between my present and the heritage of my past is also part of what is known as "the circle of understanding", which leads to *a deepening and widening of my own self-awareness* through this corrective circularity of understanding. Thus, a certain interfusion of different horizons takes place and otherness is overcome… between myself and the other, between the past and the present. (PU 268; emphasis added)

Notice that confrontation with the other leads to "a deepening and widening of my own self-awareness." The provocative other gives me back to myself in an enlarged version. "Understanding consciousness," Gadamer argues, "acquires – through its immediate access to the literary tradition – a genuine opportunity to change and *widen* its horizon, *and thus enrich its world* by a whole new and deeper dimension" (TM 390; emphasis added).

Gadamer refers to this self-enrichment through the other as the "miracle of understanding": "The task of hermeneutics is to clarify this miracle of understanding, which is not a mysterious communion of souls, but sharing in a common meaning" (TM 292). Elsewhere he describes this "miracle" as "the transformation of something *alien and dead* into total contemporaneity and familiarity" (TM 163; emphasis added). Philosophical hermeneutics miraculously raises from the dead the other's voice. James Risser notes in this regard, "What is needed here is to see that written texts present us with the real hermeneutic task of a transformation back into living language" (1997: 166). Enlivening the other's voice, our encounter with the alien ends by making that which is over against us part of our common, living horizon. "Where it is successful," writes Gadamer, "understanding means a *growth* in inner awareness, which as a new experience enters into the texture of our own mental experience" (1981: 109).

The encounter with the other thus allows one's own horizon to become "enriched and more mature" (TM 69). The negativity that is thwarted expectation leads to a widening of possible expectations in the future. Such negativity depends precisely upon the wager of one's own "family, state, and society." "Only the support of familiar and common understanding makes possible the venture into the alien, the lifting up of something out of the alien, and thus the *broadening* and *enrichment of our own experience* of the world" (Gadamer 1976: 15, emphasis added). Accordingly, "*all such understanding is ultimately self-understanding*" (TM 260). This is an important point for it raises the question of application. The other's voice/tradition is ultimately applied to one's own. Paul Ricoeur notes in this regard, "It is the function of hermeneutics to make the understanding of the other – and of his signs in various cultures – coincide with the understanding of the self and of being" (1974: 51).

For Gadamer, such application is fundamental to the process of understanding. "We consider application to be just as integral a part of the hermeneutical process as are understanding and interpretation" (TM 308). In fact, the "*task of application*… we have recognized as the central problem of hermeneutics" (TM 315). Notice in this regard that it would seem that hermeneutics is so little concerned with the other as such that it consistently seeks to make the other a contemporary to self. Mehta notes:

> Just as explication or interpretation is inseparable from understanding and is an integral moment in it, so also is application; comprehension, explication, and application together constitute in their unity the fully executed activity of understanding. We do not really understand and explicate a text, whether philosophical or literary, legal or scriptural, so long as we take it only as an historical document and do not translate it so that it speaks to us in our present concrete situation, so long, in other words, as it is not applied to the historical point where we stand, here and now. (UT 157)

Accordingly, the hermeneutic confrontation with the other comes to its completion when the self situates the other with respect to the self's present horizon. If understood, the voice of the other, according to philosophical hermeneutics, speaks to the contemporary situation, divulges lessons for the one present. Voices from the other shore, and/or the past, do not speak from an isolated and overcome moment. "All that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person or text. But *this openness always includes our situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of our own meanings* or ourselves in relation to it" (TM 268; emphasis added). We understand the other by reducing his pure otherness to a moment in our own possibilities. This is the expansion of understanding. "We do not relate the other's opinion to him but to our own opinions and views" (TM 385). Hermeneutics, so understood, is the *enlargement* of the self's horizon through the other's *supplementing* voice. In this way, and according to Richard Rorty, hermeneutics is edifying:

> Since "education" sounds a bit too flat, and *Bildung* a bit too foreign, I shall use "edification" to stand for this project of finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking. The attempt to edify… may consist in the hermeneutic activity of making connections between our own culture and some exotic culture or historical period… edifying discourse is *supposed* to be abnormal, to take us out of ourselves by the power of strangeness, to aid us in becoming new beings. (1979: 360)

Edification, for Rorty, is the becoming new through the encounter with the other, making the self larger through connections with the other. As Rorty notes, and Gadamer would in all likelihood agree, the other gives the self a new way of describing itself that it had not (could not?) hitherto considered. Recalling that it is by means of language that we have our being, we now recognize that if the other affords the self a new vocabulary, the other in effect affords the self a new self and world, a new Dasein. "By learning a foreign language," Gadamer contends, "men do not alter their relationship to the world… *they extend and enrich it* by the world of the foreign language" (TM 452; emphasis added). In this regard, the self travels abroad in search of ever widening circles of self-understanding and self-description. "To understand," Ricoeur adds, "… is to receive an enlarged self from the apprehension of proposed worlds which are the genuine object of interpretation" (1981: 182–183). In this regard, the self returns to itself, after having gone out to the other, with the treasures the other has bestowed upon it. Gadamer, in fact, explicitly deploys the tropes of "adventure" and "traveler" to characterize the encounter with the other. "An *adventure*… interrupts the customary course of events, but is positively and significantly related to the context which it interrupts. Thus an *adventure* lets life be felt as a whole, in its breadth and in its strength… It ventures out into the uncertain" (TM 69; emphasis added). Of course, as with all adventures, there is a homecoming, a return to self: "If by entering foreign language-worlds, we overcome the prejudices and limitations of our previous experience of the world, *this does not mean that we leave and negate our own world*. Like *travelers* we *return home* with new experiences" (TM 448; emphases added). Thus do we appropriate the foreign in relation to our point of departure. We do not *negate* our world; we simply *supplement* it. On our adventure, our hermeneutic journey, the alien is overcome, and we return enriched. "The fact that a foreign language is being translated means that this is simply an extreme case

of hermeneutical difficulty – i.e., of *alienness and its conquest*" (TM 387; emphasis added). Here, in no uncertain terms, Gadamer suggests that hermeneutics is the "conquest" of the alien. In this way, we are *heroic* adventurers (a discussion to which I return in full in Chap. 6). Elsewhere he notes, "It [i.e., the hermeneutically enlightened consciousness] is higher because *it allows the foreign to become one's own*, not by destroying it critically or reproducing it uncritically, *but by explicating it within one's own horizons with one's own concepts and thus giving it new validity*" (1976: 94, emphasis added).

Recalling his use of "miracle," we see that Gadamer's hermeneutics curiously betrays an aggressive good will. Gadamer suggests that it is only when one takes up the foreign into one's own that the foreign has life. Does this not resonate with a Hegelian *Aufhebung*? This will in fact become a point of tension between Mehta and Gadamer that I will address in Chaps. 4 and 6. Suffice to say for now, the fusion of horizons, as depicted here, is an enriching experience in which what was initially a provocative other is "conquered," and subsequently appropriated within the self's heretofore prejudiced, but now enlarged horizon. The other, be it the otherness of our past traditions, or the otherness of the other's traditions, is a penultimate moment in the return to self. Gadamer writes, "To recognize one's own in the alien, to become at home in it, is the basic movement of spirit, whose being consists only in returning to itself from what is other" (TM 14). The fusion of horizons thus provides the moment for the prejudiced self's enlargement, enrichment. "It is of the very essence of the 'hermeneutic experience,' i.e., the explicit comprehension of the voice of the past and the other," writes Mehta, "that in it the horizons, within which both he who seeks to understand and what is understood exist, open out, move towards and fuse with each other" (PIU 131). Philosophical hermeneutics edifies.

## 3.4 Heidegger's *Kehre* and Post-*Kehre* Works

Thus far we have discussed Heidegger's question of Being, Dasein, thrownness and guilt, as well as Gadamer's prejudice, provocation, and fusion of horizons. I propose that they play an essential role in Mehta's project, especially insofar as he presupposes their analyses in his critique not only of the cross-cultural encounter in general, but also comparative philosophy and comparative philosophy of religion in particular. At this point, I suggest that in addition to Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, Mehta's work in the 1980s, specifically on the Hindu tradition, also relies heavily on Heidegger's "later writings." As I suggested in the previous chapter, Heidegger's work re-*orients* Mehta to his classical traditions. For that reason, and in anticipation of the analysis in Chap. 5, I suggest we examine here Heidegger's "ontological difference," the "opening" (*Riss*), and finally the poet and poetry. While Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics figure prominently in Mehta's delimitation of Western ontotheology in the 1970s (and to some extent the 1980s), Heidegger's later themes influence him most, I argue, in his postmetaphysical interpretation of Hinduism which he undertook in the 1980s.

### *3.4.1 Heidegger's Ontological Difference*

While certainly not turning his back on the existential analytic in *Being and Time*, Heidegger's attention is nevertheless redirected in his later writings away from Dasein's intentional structures towards the notion of the "ontological difference," that is, the difference between Being and beings, itself the forgotten presupposition of metaphysics. "Without an awareness of what Heidegger has called the Ontological Difference, i.e. the difference between beings and their Being, metaphysics could not have arisen" (MM 3). For Heidegger, ontotheology consistently fails to notice the constitutive spacing of the difference that allows the essent, the being, to appear as different from, and thus in need of, its ground in metaphysical Being. Consequently, Being is understood on the model of the being. As beings are in their presence, Being is understood as the most present being. In this way, it would appear that beings are simply manifestations of Being. Contesting classical metaphysic's proclivity to reduce difference to such a simple identity, Heidegger examines the difference *as* origin. That is to say, instead of difference being the privation of Being, it is now understood to be that which enables Being and beings in the first place. "We think of Being rigorously," writes Heidegger, "only when we think of it in its difference with beings, and of beings in their difference with Being" (1969: 62). A being can be what it is in its particularity only when it's difference from Being is articulated, or quite possibly, forgotten. In order for a being to be, Being itself must withdraw from view. We must disregard the radical temporality of Dasein in order to focus on what there is. "What is important in this question," argues Mehta, "is to keep in mind the distinction Heidegger makes between a thing that is, any entity of which we can say 'it is', and its being (much as we distinguish between the real and its reality, the true and truth, and beyond that the sense of reality or truth as such). Later, Heidegger was to call it 'the ontological difference'" (TP 82-83).[31] Such ontological difference precludes the presumed ontological identity of Being and beings. "When we deal with the Being of beings and with the beings of Being," Heidegger argues, "we deal in each case with a difference" (1969: 141).

For Heidegger, as for Mehta, a chronic amnesia afflicts traditional metaphysics. That is to say, metaphysics repeatedly forgets that its concentration on the Being of beings, or essents, as a first philosophy presupposes a difference between Being and beings, a difference that makes the study of Being as such a "penultimate" concern.

> The history of Western philosophy… is a history of 'metaphysical' thinking, i.e., thinking about the Being of essents (not about Being itself) and *it begins with the oblivion of the*

[31] It is in fact this ontological difference that provides the point of departure for much of Derrida's, as well as Taylor's, work. Derrida, calling this "aboriginal difference," *différance*, writes, "This does not mean that the différance which produces differences is before them in a simple and in itself unmodified and indifferent present. Différance is the nonfull, nonsimple 'origin'; it is the structured and differing origin of differences" (1973: 141). Taylor also notes, "Absolute difference 'is' the difference of the between that creates the time and space for specific differences to emerge and pass away" (1990: 181).

> *difference* of Being from beings which is implied in all inquiry about the Being of essents. In uncovering itself in the essent, Being withdraws itself as such and… conceals its difference from the essent…. The history of Being begins with the oblivion of Being, of Being's own nature and its difference from the essent. (PMH 408; emphasis added)

To inquire into the Being of beings, Mehta argues, metaphysicians had to ignore the question of Being itself. Only when the question of Being is overlooked can the question of the Being of beings be investigated. Privileging the one over the other, metaphysics overlooks that Being itself is in fact grounded by beings. Metaphysics seeks for the irreducible, positive ground, forgetting that the very movement from the one to the other *presupposes* the difference between the two. Mehta thus argues, "Metaphysics conceives Being as the ground of all that is, forgetting that what is grounded, in its turn grounds its ground *as* ground" (MM 3). Not only do beings need Being, but also Being, contrary to metaphysical speculation, needs beings in order to be Being. The ground can be a ground only to that which is in need of ground, and thus the ground's ground is that which is grounded by ground. Ground and grounded belong to one another across an opening, a difference, an *ontological* difference. The one cannot be what it is without its differential relationship to the other. Overcoming metaphysics thus entails thinking the *same* before thinking *identity*. Being and beings are the *same* in that they share a common "source" and not a "common denominator." "Both [i.e., Being and beings/essents] emerge, as thus differentiated, from the Difference," writes Mehta, "their identical source" (PMH 479). An identical source yields the same, a denominator the identical. Let's consider this more closely.

Those that complement each other across the difference Heidegger labels, the Same (*das Selbe*), with which he contrasts identity. Identity, for Heidegger, is immediately present to itself: it is empty tautology (A = A). The same, by contrast, involves a mediation, a separation. "The equal or identical always moves toward the absence of difference, so that everything may be reduced to a common denominator," Heidegger argues, "The same, by contrast, is the belonging together of what differs, through a gathering by way of the difference. We can only say 'the same' if we think difference" (1971: 218). The identical participates in a common denominator, a positive point held in common. The same, by contrast, shares a common absence, a difference. Here we see an interesting development in Heidegger's thought that may point to a divergence from Gadamer. I noted above that Gadamer's *die Sache selbst* provides a positive point of fusion between interlocutors. Dialogue partners share a positive meaning. Derrida, in contrast, points to the absence that is the play of signs. Heidegger's "same" differs from "identity" in much the same way as Derrida's *différance* differs from Gadamer's *die Sache selbst*. Being and beings are the same because they derive from an absence and not a common, positive denominator; or, Being and beings are the same because they share a common yet significantly ironic denominator. The ironic denominator is the later Heidegger's *Sache*: the "matter of thinking is the difference *as* difference" (1969: 47). I also mentioned earlier that Mehta resonates more closely with Gadamer's *die Sache selbst* than with Derrida's *différance*. Here I would like to qualify this reading. Mehta, I propose, finds Gadamer's fusion of horizons and *die Sache selbst* more helpful than Derrida's

*différance* when it comes to cultural others participating in a dialogue. But, as will become clear especially in Chap. 5, Mehta relies upon Heidegger's (and by a certain extension Derrida's) ontological difference when it comes to discussions concerning the logic of the Hindu tradition. Anticipating that discussion, Mehta, contrary to the popular Advaita Vedānta, sees in the Hindu tradition a concern with a fundamental separation, an ontological difference, an absence of the plenitude of being.

Metaphysics suffers from its amnesia precisely because the difference as such is un-re-presentable. If the metaphysical tradition is always occupied with the presence of things present, then it is precisely the present *absence* of the difference that never comes to presence and thus does not preoccupy metaphysics.[32] Dealing only with the Being of beings present, metaphysicians overlook the difference that withdraws in order to allow beings to emerge. It is this present absence that is the difference that enables the same. "The dif-ference does not mediate after the fact by connecting world and things through a middle added on to them. Being the middle, it *first* determines world and things in their presence" (Heidegger 1971: 202). For Heidegger, this aboriginal difference is the inaugural oblivion. "We speak of the *difference* between Being and beings…. That is the *oblivion* of the difference. The oblivion here to be thought is the veiling of the difference as such… this veiling has in turn *withdrawn* itself from the beginning" (Heidegger 1969: 50). There is always already a difference, an opening, a clearing. All beings and subjects are thereby interminably late. "A consideration of what 'Being' in its difference from beings means has thus led to the Difference as fundamental to both" (PMH 485). It is this "non-representable origin," this Difference, this opening that calls for closer consideration.

### *3.4.2 The Opening, the Riss*

In his 1935 essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger introduces the trope of a Greek temple (a trope that significantly reemerges in Mehta's work with a geo-specific relocation). "A building, a Greek *temple*, portrays nothing," writes Heidegger, "It is the temple-work that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being" (1977b: 167). The temple provides the site for such existential binaries as "endurance and decline," and most significantly, "birth and death," the very limits of Dasein, or Being-in-the-world. In this way, the work of the temple is constitutive: it "*first* fits together." The temple is what first relates birth to death, and endurance to decline. Heidegger continues (worth quoting at length):

[32] Taylor notes in this regard, "This non-representable origin gives rise to conceptual and representational thought only insofar as it is forgotten, excluded, or repressed. As the non-representable 'before,' which is always already 'prior to thought,' difference constitutes an 'essential past' that can never be present-ed" (1987: 46).

> Standing there, the building rests on the rocky ground. This resting of the work draws up out of the rock the obscurity of that rock's bulky yet spontaneous support. Standing there, the building holds its ground against the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm manifest in its violence. The luster and gleam of the stone, though itself apparently glowing only by the grace of the sun, first brings to radiance the light of the day, the breadth of the sky, the darkness of the night. The temple's firm towering makes visible the invisible space of air. The steadfastness of the work contrasts with the surge of the surf, and its own repose brings out the raging of the sea. Tree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter into their distinctive shapes and thus come to appear as what they are. (1977b: 167–168)

Notice that while Heidegger here again suggests that it is only by means of the temple that all other beings first find their relations, we see that it is something more than merely bringing together that which had already existed. He speaks of the temple as that which "first makes," and "first brings." The sea rages *only* when it strikes up against the staid temple. There is something elemental about this temple. In this regard, is Heidegger speaking about a specific temple on the Grecian seaside? Or, does the temple serve as a trope, a symbol, for something more, or perhaps less? What is this "temple"?

I propose that in the work of Mark C. Taylor we find an exposition of Heidegger's temple that helps explain the correspondence between Heidegger's temple and Mehta's temple to be discussed in the following chapter. Taylor first undertakes an etymological study of the word "temple" that he feels sheds light on Heidegger's usage. From the Latin *templum*, and the Greek *temnos*, "temple" signifies, Taylor proposes, that which is "cut off." Recalling that for Heidegger the temple portrays nothing, we now read with Taylor, "the temple images nothing by holding open the differential *interval* of the between" (1990: 112). The temple/*templum*/*temnos* is the clearing, the spacing, the ontological difference needed in order for opposites to take place, and thus it images *no-thing*. "The dif-ference, as the middle for world and things, metes out the measure of their presence. In the bidding that calls thing and world, what is really called is: the dif-ference" (Heidegger 1971: 203). To this extent, the temple is the site of the *Riss*, or tear that opens an opening for Being and beings to shine forth. "The origin *of* art is an 'original' cleavage (*Riss*) that makes possible all such paired opposites" (Taylor 1987: 49). The original cleavage provides the spacing for *das Selbe*, and ultimately for truth.

"Truth is the primal strife" (Heidegger 1977b: 185). According to Heidegger, so little is truth taken to be a static correspondence between the intellect and things that are, that truth is now understood to be a dynamic separating/bringing together. "Truth does not exist in itself beforehand… it is… only the openness of beings that first affords the possibility of a somewhere… Clearing of openness and establishment in the open region belong together. They are the single essence of the happening of truth" (Heidegger 1977b: 186). Not forgetting his earlier work on facticity, Heidegger suggests that those beings shining forth in the opening are thoroughly laden with historical particularity. Accordingly, those beings that find their being by way of the opening are in no way dictated by the opening itself, as if the opening could entail a positive content. Rather the particulars show up at the same time that the opening opens forth, and the positive content of the opposites

so enjoined depends upon the historical language and community showing forth in the opening, the difference.[33] "The dif-ference gathers the two out of itself as it calls them into the rift that is the dif-ference itself" (Heidegger 1971: 207).

The difference, though a strife, does not entail a pure antagonism. While there is certainly an emphasis on the difference (an emphasis required by the long tradition of metaphysics and its emphasis on identity), the opening enables the belonging-together of the opposites so enjoined. Ontological difference enables relationship. Mehta writes in this regard, "Access to this *belonging*-together… is possible… only when we break loose from the attitude of representational thinking, when we take the spring away both from the current conception of man as *animal rationale*, a subject for his objects, as well as from Being conceived as the Ground of all essents as such" (PMH 482). Contrary to metaphysics, Being and beings do not maintain their own identity outside of their mutual relationship. For this reason, Heidegger suggests that there is an intimate bond obtaining in the difference. "Strife is not a rift [*Riss*], as a mere cleft is ripped open; rather, it is the intimacy with which opponents belong to each other" (1977b: 188). In this intimacy, this belonging-together of "opponents," we find the "event of appropriation," or the *Ereignis*. "We must experience simply this owning in which man and Being are delivered over to each other, that is, we must enter into what we call *the event of appropriation* (*Ereignis*)…. The event of appropriation is that realm, vibrating within itself, through which man and Being reach each other in their nature, achieve their active nature by losing those qualities with which metaphysics has endowed them" (Heidegger 1969: 36–37). Neither Being nor Man contains its own essence in a vacuum. Rather, Man and Being share a relationship across the opening that is the difference. Inasmuch as the temple/*templum*/*temnos* is the original tear that holds apart opposites, it at the same time holds together opposites. The temple holds apart those that belong together.

Heidegger's opening, his temple, conditions the dynamic relationship within which all things find their differential space. Tropically delimiting the dissemination of relationships to four entities in particular, Heidegger speaks of the earth and sky, divinities and mortals – the *Geviert*, or 'fourfold'. The world is the interplay of these four: "Their unitary four-fold [i.e., earth and sky, divinities and mortals] is the world" (Heidegger 1971: 201). Mehta also speaks of "our world" as "the *network* of meanings in which we live" (DV 254; emphasis added). Each one of Heidegger's four contains within its being a networked relationship, that is, a differential relationship to the other three, and cannot be what it is without reflecting these others.[34]

[33] "If one can speak of Being… it must be sought at the level of those inherited openings," Vattimo concurs, "… within which Dasein, man, is always already thrown as into its provenance. This, above all, is the 'nihilistic' meaning of hermeneutics" (1997: 14). Derrida also points out, "[Différance] is not a being-present, however excellent, unique, principal, or transcendent one makes it. It commands nothing, rules over nothing, and nowhere does it exercise any authority" (1973: 153).

[34] L. M. Vail notes in this regard, "The four are not independent bodies but have instead more the nature of poles of the interplay, each reflecting and designating the others in itself and itself in the others, much as a series of mirrors engage in mutual self-reflection and self-designation" (1972: 145).

In this way, notice that Heidegger's *Geviert* seemingly converges with a prominent Buddhist trope found in the *Avataṁsaka-sūtra*, or Wreath-Garland Sūtra, that is, Indra's net. William R. Lafleur explains:

> Indra… is said to have… a vast net that stretches out in all directions…. [I]n each of the "eyes" in the mesh of this cosmic-sized net there hangs a precious jewel and these too are infinite in number… upon close inspection one finds that each jewel there reflects the multitude of other glittering jewels; that is, the light of all is mirrored in each and all. In addition there is no one jewel in that vast net that could possibly be singled out as having special or central importance. The beauty and majesty of the universe lies not in the elevation of one jewel to preeminent position or role but in the mutual and unhindered interreflection and co-illumination achieved by the vast array of particular gems. This, of course, is a metaphor for Buddhism's teachings of no atman; it also implies co-dependent origination. (1988: 93)

Elsewhere, LaFleur speaks of the "Buddhist refusal to think of any single being as the creator or progenitor of all other beings and forms of existence" (1988: 100). Because the difference is what enables identity, no one entity or essent can proclaim preeminent ontological status. Each is what it is only through its difference from the rest.

Here we can immediately discern the implicit refutation of classical Western metaphysics' reduction of difference to simple origin. Buddhism's insistence on differential relations, i.e., *pratītya-samutpāda*, would seem to resonate rather closely with Heidegger's project. Indeed, each "gem" is what it is in its difference from the others. Of most significance here is that the difference is not external to the gem itself. The difference is constitutive of each gem. The singular gem is the reflection/negation of all the other gems.[35] In itself, it is nothing. Despite metaphysics' propensity to search for universal essence, there is no "gem-ness." Mehta himself, in one of his rare comments on Buddhism, makes a similar point precisely as a corrective to Advaita Vedānta's monistic ontology (a topic to which I return in the last chapter):

> We have the same thing in Advaita here in India. We have emphasized oneness and identity in things so much that we have not paid sufficient attention to the differences in things. You cannot really understand the sameness between A and B unless you notice that A is different from B. It is the power of the negative and this is what Buddhism is about. (LW 230)

While Heidegger does not speak of an infinite number of gems in Indra's net, he nevertheless suggests something seemingly quite similar: "Earth and sky, divinities and mortals – being at one with one another of their own accord – belong together by way of the simpleness of the united four-fold. *Each of the four mirrors in its own way the presence of the others*" (1971: 179). The early trope for this differential structure was the temple/*templum*/*temnos*. The temple is the *Umriss*, or original tear, that opens the space for Being and beings, earth and sky, divinities and mortals. Mehta notes:

[35] In this way, "Complete identification," Taylor argues, "would require an infinite series of negations" (1992: 28).

> Each of these four is involved in the other and together they constitute an indissoluble unity. Each, in itself at one with the other, belongs to the other and together they are united in the simple unity of the Four-fold. Each of the four reflects in its way the nature of the other and each is in its way mirrored back into its very own…. This owning-expropriating four-foldness in its unity is called by Heidegger the mirror-game (*Spiegel-Spiel*) of the Four-fold, its play of reflection, play, because not explicable by anything outside itself. (PMH 493)

Significantly, for Heidegger and Mehta, it is left neither to the scientists, nor to the philosophers, to stay with this elusive difference. Rather, it is the task of the poets, for they, according to Fred Dallmayr, are the "individuals who are most unlikely to abuse their insights for manipulative or strategic designs" (1993: 177).

### *3.4.3 Poets and Poetry*

Contesting ontotheology's penchant for presence, simple identities, and origins, the spacing that is the temple for Heidegger points to a primal, present absence. That is to say, the oblivion of the difference comes to presence precisely as what is absent. "Mortals… remain closer to that absence because they are touched by presence…. But because presence conceals itself at the same time, it is itself already absence…. For the poet, these are the traces of the fugitive gods" (Heidegger 1971: 93). The opening opens through the withdrawal, a withdrawal poetically marked by the trace of the gods. Such withdrawal entails the incompletion of any one interpretation. "The poet's work means: to say after – to say again *the music of the spirit of apartness* that has been spoken to the poet" (Heidegger 1982: 188). The poet thus responds to "the marks that the abyss remarks"; the poet sings the song of separation. For the poet, there is always already a present absence, a withdrawal of the sacred. Precisely in this way, the poet is not a metaphysician. Accordingly, Heidegger insists that the poet can only "say after." Like Dasein thrown into its world not of its own accord, so too the poet can only come after that which has always already gone ahead. "The holy bestows its arrival by reserving itself in its withholding withdrawal" (Heidegger 1982: 165). In direct opposition to ontotheology, the holy is precisely what is always already absent.

The *withdrawal* of the holy, of the god opens the space of passage, that is, provides the openness through which movement, and consequently genuine relationship, takes place. This is most important for Mehta's reading of Hinduism. Again anticipating our discussion in Chap. 5, Mehta conspicuously locates the culmination of the Hindu tradition in the *withdrawal* of Kṛṣṇa from the *gopīs*. The opening afforded by the withdrawal of the holy opens the space requisite for the devoted self's relationship to the other *as* other. In other words, while Heidegger may speak of "speculative thinking," we will see that for Mehta only a space of difference enables the song, dance, prayer, petition of the one to the other: "Wherever a present being encounters another present being or even only lingers near it… there openness already rules, the free region is in play. Only this openness grants to the movement of speculative thinking the passage through what it thinks" (Heidegger

1977b: 441). Significantly, we sense here a fatal challenge to phenomenology. As an extension of the metaphysical tradition, phenomenology addresses precisely that which positively comes to presence, that is, "the expression '*phenomenon*' signifies *that which shows itself in itself*, the manifest" (BT 51). In this way, the present absence that is the trace shatters phenomenology. The absence that is the difference is precisely what *does not* show itself. Emanuel Levinas notes in this regard, "If the signifyingness of the trace consists in signifying without making appear… we can at least approach this signifyingness in another way by situating it with respect to the phenomenology it interrupts" (1996: 61).

While the temple serves as the trope for this primal opening, Heidegger eventually locates language as the source for the separation of Being and beings. For Heidegger, as for Mehta, language announces, and thus brings to presence, articulated/related being.[36] Language, then, is the temple: "Language is the precinct (*templum*), that is, the house of Being" (Heidegger 1977b: 132). Gadamer, too, notices this central role of articulation for Heidegger: "The primacy that language and understanding have in Heidegger's thought indicates the priority of the 'relation' over against its relational members – the I who understands and that which is understood." (1976: 50). Here Gadamer makes a rather significant point: the *relation* is more important than that which is related. Beings do not exclusively own their own being. In other words, a being can be what it is because it is in relation to other beings. For Heidegger, Gadamer, and Mehta, language articulates this relation. The one most attuned to this primordial nature of language, to this primordial relation/difference, is the poet. "The decisive experience is that which the poet has undergone with the word – and with the word inasmuch as it alone can bestow a relation to a thing" (Heidegger 1982: 65). Qualifying the authority of the poet, Mehta, Heidegger, and Gadamer contend that the poet is a *respondent* to the play of poetry. The poet, countering the spirit of the technological age wherein Dasein makes nature stand by as a pure source of raw energy, relinquishes the colonial grasp on Being. The poet renounces his will-to-power. "The poet must renounce having words under his control as the portraying names for what is posited" (Heidegger 1982: 147). The poet thus allows language to break open the clearing: the creative use of language (*poiesis*) instigates the strife. "Poetry is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling" (Heidegger 1982: 218).

That human being depends on a prior relation to something outstanding suggests that the intentional activities of the subject violate this fundamental relation. "Modern man," according to Heidegger, in particular, imposes himself on Being.

> By such willing, modern man turns out to be the being who, in all relations to all that is, and thus in his relation to himself as well, rises up as the producer who puts through, carries out, his own self and establishes this uprising as the absolute rule. The whole objective inventory in terms of which the world appears is given over to, commended to, and thus subjected

[36] Significantly, Macquarrie and Robinson footnote Heidegger's use of "articulate" (either *artikulieren* or *gliedern*) as follows: "The verbs 'autikulieren' and 'gliedern' can both be translated by 'articulate' in English; even in Germany they are nearly synonymous, but in the former the emphasis is presumably on the 'joints' at which something gets divided, while in the latter the emphasis is presumably on the 'parts' or 'members'" (BT 196 fn. 1).

> to the command of self-assertive production. Willing has in it the character of command; for purposeful self-assertion is a mode in which the attitude of the producing, and the objective character of the world, concentrate into an unconditional and therefore complete unity. (Heidegger 1982: 111).

It is precisely in his imposition, however, that man fails to respond to, and thus misses, the dimension of depth that is the trace of the fugitive gods; he fails to listen to the difference. "Their listening draws from the command of the dif-ference what it brings out as sounding word. This speaking that listens and accepts is responding" (Heidegger 1982: 209). The responsive poet recognizes the belatedness of his being. It is as a respondent that the poet plays his vital role. As a respondent, the poet relinquishes total appropriation and transparency. Accordingly, it is poetry's inherent equivocation, its inherent polysemy, that sustains the inexhaustibility of the four-fold.

If technological language, that is, artificial language, pretends to conceptual transparency, eliminating shadow and nuance, then it is the equivocal, polysemic language of the poet that intentionally maintains the hiddenness within all disclosure. "Language involves an ensconcement, a withdrawal," explains Vail, "This is characterized by the fact that the poet cannot find a name for everything, and this means he cannot bring everything forth in simple clarity and closeness" (1972: 172). The poet thus strategically maintains an opacity in his transparency. "The poet," Heidegger tells us, "must relinquish the claim to the assurance that he will on demand be supplied with the name for that which he has posited as what truly is" (1982: 146–147). The poet is in this sense the one who builds the temple through his responsive gestures to the irrecoverable present absence of the fugitive gods. "By holding open the exorbitant middle, the word of the poet," notes Taylor, "tolls 'the trace of the holy' (*Spur des Heiligen*). This trace of difference can never be expressed directly, revealed totally, or known completely" (1987: 58). Notice that Taylor speaks here of a trace that can *never* be known completely: there is a structural withdrawal that jealously guards its opacity. Gadamer also notes in this regard:

> The objective is *not* to discern or pinpoint the univocity of the poet's intent; not by any means. Nor is it a matter of determining the univocity of the "meaning" expressed in the poem itself. Rather what is involved is attentiveness to the ambiguity, multivocity and indeterminacy unleashed by the poetic text – a multivocity which does not furnish a blank check to the license of the reader, but rather constitutes the very target of the hermeneutical struggle demanded by the text.[37]

The poet maintains an opacity, an absence, an intentional mutlivocity and indeterminacy within the words he brings to presence through his poetry by an intentional use of figurative, and thus duplicitous, language. The poet's polysemy is the direct effect of the present absence of the difference. In reference to the *Mahābhārata* as a work of poetry, Mehta notes in this regard, "I doubt if the *Mahābhārata* mode of discourse can be completely demythologized. *No poetic discourse can*" (DV 270; emphasis added). Mehta writes elsewhere with regard

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[37] Quoted from Gadamer's *Wer bin Ich und West bist Du?* in Dallmayr (1996: 44).

to the *Ṛgveda*: "The authors of this first, massive, verbal articulation of human religiousness were Rishis – seers of the Vedic mantras and pathmakers, craftsmen of the sacred word and revelers in disciplined polysemy – who wove the many-splendoured fabric of words and opened up a well-structured space of sacrality, building pathways between the human and the Divine" (HT 103). Here poetry explicitly builds pathways; pathways are relations. The poet's polysemy ultimately brings the ineffaceable contingency of the present to presence.[38]

The oblivion of the difference renders the pursuit of univocity vain. Metaphysics betrays its vanity. "The irreducible duplicity of language," Taylor proposes in this regard, "implies a rhythm that counters the unifying force of the Logos. While language holds together opposites usually set apart, it also holds apart the opposites it brings together. In this way, language eternally returns to difference – the difference is the origin of the work of art and the temple of everything that is" (1987: 55). The poet maintains language's true nature as a differential play. Working with Hölderlin's poetry, Heidegger notes, "For Hölderlin God, as the one who he is, is unknown and it is just as *this Unknown One* that he is the measure for the poet… the god who remains unknown, must by showing *himself* as the one he is, appear as the one who remains unknown" (1982: 222). The "Unknown One" is the measure against which the poet must weave his poetry. Like the temple upon whose steadfastness the raging sea depends for its measure, the poet (unlike the will-to-power of technological man) embraces the unknown *as* unknowable. The god comes to presence *as* what *is* absent, disrupting in turn the phenomenological project. Recall, Heidegger spoke of "the dif-ference" that "metes out the measure of their presence." Here it is the withdrawn god that opens the aboriginal difference. In this way, the poet, and perhaps unlike the hermeneut, preserves in language the other in its alterity, disclosing in turn his own authorial incompletion. The poet practices a *Gelassenheit*, a letting-be. Unlike any other, the poet patiently articulates the dynamic between the presence of the present as well as the absence of the present. Significantly, Taylor refers to this poetic experience as a religious conversion: "Purposeless waiting, which, Heidegger insists, is 'beyond the distinction between activity and passivity,' displaces the purposeful striving of the constructive subject. The release from masterful self-assertion is, in effect, a conversion that borders on the religious" (1987: 56–57).[39] The religious conversion is the conversion from the imposition of

[38] "The reason Heidegger talks about Being," Rorty contends, "… is that he wants to direct our attention to the difference between inquiry and *poetry*, between struggling for power and accepting contingency" (1991: 36). According to Rorty's interpretation, poetic language is contingent language.

[39] Taylor continues, "Unlike Hegelian *Er-Innerung* (re-collection), Heideggerian re-collection does not overcome every *Zerrissenheit*(dismemberment, torn-ness) by closing every wound that rends and every tear that lacerates. To the contrary, waiting releases one into a *Riss* that forever remains open. Instead of the security and certainty of the self-possession that is supposed to be produced by the mastery of otherness and the domination of difference, the converted subject discovers that 'the more venturesome risk produces no shelter. But it creates a safety or secureness (*Sichersein*) for us. Secure, *securus*, *sine cure* means: without care (*Sorge*). Here care has the character of purposeful self-assertion [*vorsatzlichen Sichdurchsetzens*] be the ways and means of unconditional production" (1987: 57).

self to the acquiescence to the other as other. In this regard, religion is the self's acceptance of incompletion. As we will see in the next few chapters, this is precisely where Mehta locates his pilgrim, itself a tellingly religious trope.

Throughout the course of this chapter, we have had the occasion to examine certain Heideggerian and Gadamerian themes on our way to Mehta's concerns in the 1970s and 1980s. Heidegger's "way and vision" begins with a meditation on the question of Being and the nature of Dasein. From there, he proceeds to the question of how Dasein is related to that which is other. Here he locates a spacing between self and other that allows relationships as such to emerge. Significantly, Dasein does not carry the burden of constituting this primordial cleavage. Rather, Dasein, the factical self, finds its being amidst this opening. Dasein is thrown into the spacing and is thus secondary, conditioned. Precisely to this extent, Dasein can only *respond* to this opening. "The way in which mortals, called out of the dif-ference into the dif-ference, speak on their own part, is: by responding" (Heidegger 1982: 209). But as Gadamer has amply shown, mortals always respond from out of a delimited horizon. "Family, society, and state" prejudice us. While *Geworfenheit* may point to a "transcendental condition," the positive content of the opening is thoroughly laden with historical and cultural idiosyncrasy. According to Gadamer, the other affords us the opportunity to expand upon this always already given base. As we will see in the following chapters, Mehta draws repeatedly from both Heidegger's early and late writings, as well as Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. We will consistently revisit the themes of facticity, provocation, openings, and responses in what follows. At this point, we turn specifically towards Mehta's appropriation of both the "hermeneutics of facticity" as well as "philosophical hermeneutics" in his critique of cross-cultural encounter and reason, that is, his postcolonial hermeneutics.

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# Chapter 4
# Pilgrims and Pilgrimages

## 4.1 Introduction

Mehta's work through most of the 1970s (and even a good bit of the 1980s) deals directly with the relationship between self and other, especially between cross-cultural others. Mehta provocatively contends that the cross-cultural encounter in the colonial and postcolonial periods more often than not presupposes an ontotheological horizon. That is to say, the metaphysical reduction of contingency and novelty to the constancy of presence (be it eidetic or dialectical) is the universal prejudice distorting cross-cultural dialogue. Contesting such a pretension, a pretension most common to the *philosophia perennis* in comparative philosophy and religion, Mehta's "post-metaphysical" thinking presupposes the irremediable finitude and provinciality of the self. Apocalyptically closing perennial philosophy, the recognition of finitude concurrently opens the space for the encounter with the cultural other *as* other. Thus the other, and its understanding of first and last things, is not simply an anthropological curiosity reducible to a trans-cultural genus. Mehta's postmetaphysical thought, unabashedly contesting such imperial histories, entails a cultural pluralism, a plurality, that is, of "Ur-horizons."

Recognizing the irreducibly provincial nature of the self, Mehta indeed senses that the encounter with the cultural other becomes particularly problematic. He feels that the Western observer often sees in the East his own, at times counter, image.[1]

[1] Though Mehta often focuses his polemical writings on the Western observer (and this chapter will be taken up with these polemics), it is important to recognize that he often levels the same criticisms at his own countrymen. As will be addressed in Chap. 6, Part IV, Mehta explicitly recognizes India's capacity to reduce the other (the West) to a moment within its own becoming.

T.B. Ellis, *On the Death of the Pilgrim: The Postcolonial Hermeneutics of Jarava Lal Mehta*, Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures 3,
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It would appear that the putative other is merely the projection of the self.[2] According to Mehta, the Hegelian tradition of philosophy and its attendant notion of progress particularly relegate non-Western cultural traditions to earlier, and thus less developed, stages in the march of *Geist*. "Asia represents a form of Spirit," Mehta writes in 1974, "which has already played its role in history and therefore belongs to a bygone age…. Hegel arranges all the philosophies and religions of the world in a progressive series culminating in his own philosophy as the final stage in the self-awareness of the Absolute Religion, Christianity" (WI 181).[3] For Mehta, such a commitment to progress ultimately underwrites an "imperial hermeneutics." Referencing the work of W. E. Hocking, he questions rhetorically, "Are we not here back to Hegel, to his notion of a potentiality that actualizes itself only by totally comprehending and swallowing up the other, and to his vision of hermeneutics as mastery of the other through the concept… *hermeneutic as a weapon directed against the other*?" (WI 183; emphasis added) The alimentary metaphor in this passage is telling. Mehta, in effect, associates the Hegelian project with a certain predatory impulse, an impulse that reappears quite tellingly in certain passages animating Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Philosophical hermeneutics harbors a colonial intention.

Impatiently assuming either familiarity or alienation, the "Hegelian self," for Mehta, projects the other's being, ultimately reducing the other to a dream image. He argues:

> According to him [i.e., Hegel], (spirit) is inherently Will, and Being in its fullness is Absolute Spirit, as the dialectical *Aufhebung* of the past and of the other its relentless instrument. To the will to interpret, or to charity understood in terms of will as the being of what is, the being of the other, far from being acknowledged in its otherness and as a voice trying to reach me with its truth, or in its identity with me in that which escapes the conceptual grasping of either of us, the being of the other can only be seen as "spirit in a state of dream" and as assimilable in that vast *megalomanic dream* into which reality is itself transformed when conceived as *Geist*. (WI 184; emphasis added)[4]

[2] Along these lines, Gerald J. Larson observes, "What appears as Other turns out to be an imaginary projection of what any one of us could have imagined – in other words, the Other becomes the Same. What appears as foreign turns out to be nothing more than what we think and imagine the foreign to be" (1988: 5).

[3] Larson also notes in this regard: "[Hegel's] exuberant rejection of matters non-European is symptomatic of the tragedy of the modern West that continues to act itself out even now as we approach the end of the twentieth century. That tragedy is one of naïveté posing as sophistication, the sad specter of the intellectual who seriously believes that cultures, languages, and traditions of the non-European world have been or could be 'assimilated' (*aufgehoben*) or surpassed – or both – through the historical experience of the modern West… strange as it may seem, many still believe the Hegelian myth or one of its many Anglo-Saxon variants" (1988: 8).

[4] Though Mehta often characterizes Hegelian philosophy for purposes of his polemics, there are moments when he acknowledges the abiding significance of Hegel: "To return to Hegel and to his view, out-moded in its formulation but not to be dismissed as just arrant Hegelian non-sense even today, that the direction of world-history moves from East to West, for Europe was to Hegel the culmination of this history, as Asia was its beginning" (WI 180). This notwithstanding, Mehta's appreciation for progress through the Western nations is all the same tainted: "The actual consequences of the French and later revolutions, the two world wars, the rise of new despotisms and the purges and concentration camps that accompany them, the atom bomb, all of these have more than justified the gloomy forebodings of Flaubert and Baudelaire, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche" (CP 74).

Immediately notice the antagonism Mehta issues not only to Hegelian philosophy, but also, albeit indirectly, to the Platonic tradition as well. With regard to the latter, consider Richard Rorty's understanding of Plato: "Plato thought that the way to get people to be nicer to each other was to point out what they all had in common – rationality" (1998: 177). Platonic ecumenism, according to Rorty, relies on what disparate parties conceptually share – rationality. Directly contesting such Platonism, Mehta significantly suggests that it is not what self and other conceptually share that is important, but precisely "that which escapes the conceptual grasping of either of us." Cultural others significantly share in their conceptual incompletion; a conceptual lack brings legatees of disparate cultures together.

Betraying the contingency of any one positive cultural tradition, the self's conceptual lack entails the other's withdrawal. The "authentic other" is irreducible to the self's concept, the self's *initiative*. Accordingly, the other is, for Mehta, the one to whom the self can only *respond*. Others interpret not, but *respond* to each other. Here we touch upon themes that resonate throughout Mehta's work: he strategically, and repeatedly, deploys "response" and "initiative" as the two poles between which the self constantly oscillates. Initiative, for Mehta, resonates with Dasein's intention, its will to interpret; response obliquely discloses that which exceeds by anteceding Dasein's intention. In this regard, Mehta addresses what appear to be the two primary, opposing activities of the transcendental subject. Additionally, response and initiative resonate for Mehta with a certain interpretation of religion and philosophy, respectively. That is to say, we can discern in Mehta's work a certain association of philosophy with the will to grasp conceptually what is other by projecting and thus initiating the being of the other. Religion, by contrast, putatively respects the other's alterity that antecedes the self's initiative, an antecedence necessitating the self's response. Here we can recall from the previous chapter Taylor's notion that the "release from masterful self-assertion is… a conversion that borders on the religious." For Mehta, it is the *pilgrim* who undergoes such a conversion, a conversion by means of which the other is recognized as a *tīrtha*.

Employing a classical South Asian religio-philosophical trope, Mehta argues that the other is a *tīrtha*, or "sacred crossing." The *tīrtha*, the *asymmetrical* other, exceeds/antecedes the self's initiative, thus providing the moment for the self's transcendence. Mehta denominates this self, the *pilgrim*. For Mehta, the pilgrim departs from his homeland (his "family, society, and state") on a journey to a *tīrtha*, an other, who in its irreducible opacity provokes, and perhaps even *destroys*, the self's anticipations and intentions. Accordingly, the other is the chance event that produces the novel, insuring the dynamic movement of self and tradition. That the pilgrim structurally responds to the other entails for Mehta a deconstruction of self and home, a deconstruction preclusive of simple edification.

In what follows, I examine Mehta's tropic deployment of *pilgrim* and *pilgrimage*. I show how Mehta's recurring themes of "roots" and "soil" indicate the irreducibly vernacular, and thus provincial, nature of the pilgrim, as well as the ensuing problems of cross-cultural encounter. With these ends in mind, and paying particular attention to his writings in the 1970s, I begin with Mehta's concerns regarding the problematic

discipline of "comparative studies," and, in particular, comparative philosophy and comparative philosophy of religion. This introduces a discussion of Mehta's dichotomy of *philosophical* understanding as opposed to *religious* understanding. As I will show, religious understanding, for Mehta, conspicuously foregoes philosophy's initiative, its will-to-power. The other's irreducible opacity renders the philosophical pursuit not only futile but also reveals philosophy's colonial intention. Unable to maintain its own equanimity in the face of such opacity, philosophy violently attempts a metaphysical reduction of alterity. "What we need… is not 'philosophy' as an expression of the conceptual mastery over things," Mehta writes, "but thinking as meditative recollection and as a gesture of *Gelassenheit*, releasement, of being let into the letting-be in relation to Being, as releasement toward things and openness to the mystery… a hermeneutic that lets-be" (WI 184-185). Elsewhere he speaks of "an awareness made possible by a rare renunciation of the voluntaristic metaphysics of the will to interpret the other, *a willingness to let the other be*" (WI 187; emphasis added). While philosophical hermeneutics pursues conceptual mastery, postcolonial hermeneutics pursues a willingness to let the other be.

Mehta's pilgrimage is a trope for his postcolonial hermeneutics. Insofar as transcendental subjectivity is ineluctably caught up with the hermeneutic task, it is invariably tied to intentional activity. Accordingly, Mehta counsels an *ironic* intention. The encounter with the other, the *tīrtha*, is for Mehta a religious journey the self willingly undertakes, and to this extent, the pilgrimage is indeed tied to the pilgrim's initiative. But this initiative/intention is ironic in that the pilgrim suffers displacement through pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is in this way an intention to undo intention.[5] Accordingly, Mehta's pilgrim challenges the subject tied to a metaphysical will-to-power. The pilgrim does not impose its prejudice. The pilgrim is at risk, and as such nurtures a "readiness to let this 'other' speak to us as the other that it is and with an openness to its truth-claim" (HCIW 5). Here we notice of course the proximity of Mehta's pilgrim to Gadamer's self. But (and this will ultimately distinguish the pilgrim from the self tied to *philosophical* hermeneutics), Mehta's pilgrim does not come to share a positive subject matter (a *die Sache selbst*) with his other; rather (and as noted above), the pilgrim shares a conceptual *lack*. Instead of the emphasis on the *enrichment* of self through encounter with the other, Mehta often highlights the self's losses in the encounter. Indeed, Mehta's shift of emphasis in his interpretation of the hermeneutic experience allows us to draw up an alternative model, a model reflecting the lessons of the colonial period and thus what may rightly be considered a postcolonial hermeneutics.

[5] It is important to remember here that Mehta's "pilgrimage" does not concern an empirical sojourn. That is to say, Mehta's "pilgrim and pilgrimage" is a theoretical construct intended to represent the structural conditions and ramifications of encountering the other, traveling here being a tropic representation of the activities of intentional subjectivity. In this way, Mehta is using language that usually signifies ontic agents in order to develop a theoretical model for the "ontology" of the relationship between self and other. As I will show in the final chapter, it is Mehta's particular understanding of intentional subjectivity that contests Continental philosophy's dyad represented by the Hero and the Nomad.

After considering Mehta's critique of comparative studies, his notions of roots and soil, and his model of the pilgrim, I conclude the chapter with an explicit consideration of the pilgrim in relation to the "Europeanization of the Earth." Mehta's pilgrim, I argue, speaks directly to the contemporary discussion concerning postcolonialism, as well as post-Orientalism, in a 'world-civilization' allegedly dominated by European styles of thought and investigation. Mehta's postcolonial hermeneutics solicits directly what W. V. Spanos calls "ontological imperialism," and in this way, perhaps it is Mehta's work that truly sets in motion postcolonial criticism.

## 4.2 Comparative Philosophy and Comparative Philosophy of Religion

Having been thrown into the turbulent intellectual climate of Harvard University in the late 1960s and 1970s, Mehta began to rethink the enterprise of cross-cultural encounter and understanding. He began to question the motivations and possibilities for comparative projects that would seemingly involve total cultural horizons, or *Lebenswelten*, as their research data. Thirty odd years after the withdrawal of overt colonial rule from India, Mehta pondered the questions of "intellectual colonialism." Arguing that the so-called cross-cultural dialogue often takes for granted an ontotheological horizon, Mehta addressed the possibility (or lack thereof) of different intellectual and cultural traditions surviving in the present age of Heidegger's *Gestell*, an age dominated by conceptual and representational thinking. For Mehta, a revaluation of comparative projects was and is indispensable for an authentic encounter between cultural others in the postcolonial world. If the self is thrown into a particular culture, always tied to "family, society, and state" as we saw in the previous chapter, then the projects of comparative philosophy, as well as comparative philosophy of religion, which programmatically seek a position devoid of prejudice and self-implication, seem highly suspect. On this point, and as I will show in what follows, some prominent hermeneutical theorists, for instance W. Halbfass and R. Panikkar, join Mehta.

Certainly during the past couple of decades, projects in "comparative philosophy" and "comparative philosophy of religion" have become increasingly reflexive in nature. Especially since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, questions of power in matters cross-cultural have gained center stage. This is, no doubt, a salubrious turn. Yet we should always be mindful of plunging into "an abyss of reflexivity" (Halbfass 1997b: 150). Hyperbolic self-criticism often debilitates the dialogical enterprise: an over-emphasis on reflexivity easily leads to a study of self, to the neglect of the other. In fact, an exaggerated concern for self-criticism would seem to forget the critical question of "hidden prejudice." As Gadamer convincingly argues, the self solely concerned with itself runs the risk of perpetuating its self-incurred tutelage. This being said, we must, all the same, commence with the reflexive question – What exactly do we mean when we use the term "comparative philosophy"? Of course, an answer to this question necessitates knowing what is meant by

"comparison" and "philosophy" singularly. Can we even have a discipline laboring under the auspicious title of "comparative philosophy"? For Mehta, Panikkar, and Halbfass, the conjunction of "comparison" and "philosophy" results in a contradiction.

What is "comparison"? What does it mean, "to compare"? According to the OED, "to compare" means "to examine in order to note the similarities and differences of." As a method, comparison "is expected to turn the description and accumulation of individual historical data into more ordered schemes" (Halbfass 1988: 429). The comparative project allegedly reaches higher levels of abstraction through the juxtaposition of data. In this regard, there is a subtle universalizing, and perhaps westernizing, bent to comparative studies. "Comparative studies are still fashionable today," Panikkar contends, "because they belong to the thrust toward universalization characteristic of western culture" (1988: 116).[6] Comparison, so understood, accumulates others in search for a common self. Halbfass notes in this regard, "The surge of comparative studies in the 19th century was indeed preceded by a propagation of comparison in the natural, especially biological, physiological and anatomical sciences. It remains generally committed to a morphological viewpoint, which aims at the discovery of pervasive structures and general, objectifiable laws" (1997c: 298). Emulating the objective sciences, comparative studies in the humanities ostensibly reduce cultural disparity to pervasive, unifying structures.

We cannot but notice here the structural requirements for comparing, for comparison: the "comparer" accumulates and juxtaposes data. A subject-object relationship obtains. The other becomes an object rather than a potential dialogue partner. "Comparison implies objectification and, ideally, a standpoint apart and equally distant from the objects of comparison" (Halbfass 1997c: 297). So understood, comparison thus depends on a third position that stands outside the accumulated and compared data: comparison requires a *comparans* and at least two *comparanda*. Panikkar observes in this regard, "To compare is an activity of the human mind that takes a stance neutral to the things to be compared. *Any comparison has somehow to transcend its subject matter*. For any comparison three things are required: at least two *comparanda*, and the *comparans*, which is a third element that has to be equally distant from and outside the *comparanda*" (1988: 122, emphasis added). Similarly, Gadamer writes, "Comparison essentially presupposes that the knowing subjectivity has the freedom to have both members of the comparison at its disposal" (TM 234). Standing at a distance from the data, the agent of comparison in effect wields a certain authority over that which is to be compared. The subject is in this way structurally removed from "both members of the comparison."

If we accept, for the moment at least, "comparison" as the accumulation of data in order to reach higher schemas of generality and abstraction, what then is "philosophy"? We of course dealt at length with the question of metaphysics in the previous chapter. This notwithstanding, I feel it is important to revisit here Mehta's

[6] J. J. Clarke also explains in this regard, "'Universalism' could be defined as the search for a single world philosophy, one which brings together and synthesizes the diverse philosophical traditions of East and West" (1997: 119).

characterization of philosophy in order to see it play out in the particular light of his critique of comparative projects. Mehta asks with respect to philosophy, is it "a sense of wonder, as with the Greeks, (or) …the need for a rational justification of established doctrine, as in the European Middle Ages, (or) … the sense of doubt and the self-assertion of the human will, as in modern philosophy"? (PPR 174) He answers in no uncertain terms: "The very *essence* of philosophical thinking" is the "*quest* for *universality*" (UT 135; emphasis added). Philosophy is the quest, the detecting, the prospecting, for that which transcends time and culture, for universality; and of course, politically speaking, it is the quest for that which renders the cultural other transparent, domesticated. Philosophy, for Mehta, is a "quest," a search in the incomplete present for a future knowledge. Now, as we saw in Chap. 3, the classical metaphysical philosophy based itself on presence. How are we to relate "presence" to "quest"? Moreover, why quest after "universality"? Why pursue philosophy?

The answer to this last question takes two forms. Positively speaking, and implicitly repeating Aristotle's famous opening line to his *Metaphysics*, the philosopher quests for universality because he desires, like all men, to know; the philosopher seeks to overturn every last stone. Negatively speaking, and perhaps disclosing the etiology of Aristotle's man, the philosopher finds lack intolerable. If the ontotheological tradition presupposes the plenitude of being in presence, then that which is lacking, that which is unknown, is a privative condition the restitution of which is philosophy's alleged goal. After all, even Mehta admits that "[a] certain degree of alienation, opacity and bafflement, a sense of resistant otherness prompts the effort to understand, and this has therefore always an other for its object, be it the otherness into which parts or elements of my own tradition have lapsed, or be it the ways of living and thinking belonging to alien religious and cultural traditions" (PU 268). Accordingly, the *philosophical* self is the subject who finds the other's opacity/resistance provocative. This prompts the subject, the self to understand the other. Here the provocation issues not necessarily from a bland curiosity or interest; rather, the philosophical self ultimately fears that which eludes its conceptual grasp, that which denies its plenitude (topics to which I return in detail in Chaps. 5 and 6).

Comparison requires the subject, i.e., the *comparans*, to stand apart from that which is compared, while philosophy seeks, not to mention presupposes, that which is ahistorical and transcultural, that is, the universal. Now, the question of the *comparans* with respect to "comparative philosophy" discloses the difficulty: Who or what is the *comparans* in the comparative philosophical project? While certainly addressing a structural concern, the question also points to the subtly pernicious character of comparative studies. That is to say, a question of significant consequence for Mehta is: what is the *motivation* to compare in the first place? Concerning particularly the cross-cultural encounter in the colonial and postcolonial period, Mehta writes in no uncertain terms, "The question of motivation cannot be evaded" (PU 271). Thus, we must ask not only *who* pursues comparative philosophy, but also, and again, *why* pursue comparative philosophy?

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, interests in comparative studies arose in Europe in earnest with a newfound interest in recently acquired Indian materials.[7] "Like the comparative study of languages and comparative religion," observes Mehta, "the beginnings of comparative philosophy go back to the cultural encounter between India and the West towards the close of the eighteenth century" (HCIW 6). The close of the eighteenth century coincides of course with the incipience of colonial rule in India. Halbfass points out that several early attempts by Westerners at the comparison of Indian and Western literatures, especially religious texts, were undertaken primarily to bolster the normative position of the Christian colonialists. Mehta refers to this as a "theology of missions." He writes, "In seeking to understand these other religious traditions he tends to interpret them in terms which have become normative in his own and thus fails to see them for what they are in themselves" (BBK 204). Precisely to this extent, the Christian prejudice was not up for debate, but only for corroboration. Mehta recognizes that the Christian position of *chrêsis* or "utilization" often served this "theology of missions" (a position he at one time in fact associates with Panikkar – see BBK 211): elements of the "other's" tradition were recognized as bearing on truth only if they ultimately supported Christianity. Mehta quotes Paul Hacker's definition of *chrêsis*:

> The practical attitude toward non-Christian religions consists mainly in what the Fathers called *utilization* (*chrêsis, usus justus*). Utilization connotes, (1) that the assimilated elements are made subservient to an end different from the context from which they were taken, (2) that they can be taken over because some truth is contained or hidden in them, (3) that they must be reoriented in order that the truth might shine forth unimpeded. (WI 175)

The Christian prospector, according to Hacker's *chrêsis*, can unearth a hidden truth in the other's tradition that was theretofore incapable of coming to light due to its contaminated context. The Christian helps the other to understand him- or herself. Here we can recall from the previous chapter Gadamer's sense of bringing back to life what is ostensibly dead in the other's utterance. In this respect, the questions motivating the comparative project were (and putatively still are, according to several authors working with postcolonial studies) irreducibly Western in their orientation.[8] Thus for Mehta:

> Comparative philosophy will amount to no more than an unthinking attempt at perpetuating Western 'philosophy' by translating Eastern thinking into the language of Western

[7] For the definitive account of the beginnings of the intellectual encounter between India and the West, see Halbfass (1988).

[8] Halbfass correctly points out that many postcolonial critics of Western hegemony reproduce this very hegemony in their reliance upon Western theories and theorists to formulate their position: "[T]he critique of Orientalism, as presented by Said and (Ronald) Inden, is a thoroughly Western affair. In a sense, it is no less European and Eurocentric than Orientalism itself. The Indian 'others' whom Inden wants to liberate from false European and Western claims do not really emerge as speakers and participants in a dialogue. He speaks about them, not to them; he is the Western authority dealing with their problems and losses. He wants to restore their identity and sovereignty; he never asks himself whether there is anything in the Indian tradition that might affect his own identity or sovereignty. In this sense, we may want to be not only beyond Orientalism, but also beyond the critique of Orientalism" (1997a: 23).

> metaphysics, taken as the universally valid paradigm. And this is bad, not because it is Western but because it hides an *unthought opacity* that stands in the way of adequately reaching out to the other, for it either prompts to an assimilation of the other or leads to a perpetuation of its otherness. (HV 242; emphasis added)[9]

As the church in Europe began to quake under the doubts of the secular philosophers, the Christian's normative claim was not displaced, but was rather simply replaced by, for example, the Utilitarian's normative claim (e.g., the work of John Stuart Mill). No longer an issue of spirituality, the other's traditions were judged as to their utility and efficacy. For Mehta, such a "secularized *chrêsis*" eventually emerges in the phenomenological project. Mehta cites Merleau-Ponty in this vein: "'Like everything built or instituted by man, India and China are immensely interesting. But like all institutions, they leave it to us to discern their true meaning; they do not give it to us completely. China and India are not entirely aware of what they are saying.'"[10]

Such extended Eurocentrism was quickly checked, to be sure, by a voracious reclamation of India's traditions by such nineteenth and twentieth century Hindu reformers as Swami Vivekānanda, Dayananda Sarasvati, and Sarvapelli Radhakrishnan. Representatives of Neo-Hinduism proactively sought to counter the Western reduction by replying *in kind*, often inclusively subsuming all traditions under the "rational" arch of Advaita Vedānta. With respect to his fellow Indians, Mehta notes, "So far, we have been mostly engaged in exploring other cultures and religious traditions with a view to discovering points of similarity, if not just confirmation of basic insights in our own" (PIU 122). Similarly, as Radhakrishnan and Moore point out, India's intellectual traditions have been committed to the search for a synthetic unity that would subsume cultural disparities under one overarching system: "There is the over-all systematic tradition which is essential to the spirit and method of Indian philosophy…. [Whose] unique genius… [is] adaptability and tolerance, which takes all groups and communities into its one truth and one life" (1957: xxvii–xxviii). This is certainly a curious "adaptability and tolerance" that "*takes* all groups… into ***its*** *one truth* and life." "Explicitly or implicitly," Halbfass observes, "Advaita Vedānta appears as the standpoint from which a certain relative value and truth is assigned to other religions and philosophies." Neither East nor West, Halbfass notes further, took seriously the "problems of understanding and interpretation, hermeneutic questions concerning the access to other traditions." (1988: 431). Of course, it is precisely hermeneutic questions such as these that form the foundation of Mehta's concern with comparative studies and research in the

[9] Elsewhere in the same essay Mehta writes, "Comparative philosophy so far has proceeded largely on the basis of an uncritical employment of these 'metaphysical' concepts, assumed as obviously and eternally valid, in the understanding of 'philosophies' such as those of India" (HV 241). D. Krishna also notes in this regard, "The so-called comparative studies were primarily a search for facts or a reporting of data in terms of a conceptual structure already formulated in the West" (1988: 73).

[10] Quoted in WI, 177.

1970s and 1980s. Can comparative studies withstand the universalizing Christian, or Neo-Hindu, prejudice? Can the structure of comparative studies survive the hermeneutic investigation committed to dialogical engagement?

The hermeneutic question formally contests the project in comparative philosophy: the hermeneutic emphasis on prejudice precludes the *comparans*. To be sure, a neutral third position with respect to philosophy would have to be removed from any particular culture, or philosophy, in order to get the two *comparanda*, and in this case two competing philosophies, on equal footing. Within the sphere of comparative philosophy, a neutral third position would have to be more universal than the universal. "The 'comparative' program," Halbfass argues in this regard, "implies a claim to theoretical objectification which does not associate itself with any particular tradition of philosophy and represents instead the idea of a 'meta-philosophy' which transcends and supersedes all traditions, and the very idea of tradition" (1988: 428). But to what extent is "meta-philosophy" actually redundant, if not in fact contradictory? Can one ever reach a point of such alienation that one leaves behind all influencing presuppositions and philosophies, "the very idea of tradition"? According to Panikkar, no: "The concept (i.e., comparative philosophy) is inherently self-contradictory since philosophy claims to be ultimate by nature, yet for philosophy to be comparative there must be a neutral basis outside the philosophies compared." (1980: 357). In other words, the *comparans* in comparative philosophy must deny its very Dasein, its being-in-the-world. Thus, not only do we sense the difficulty, if not impossibility, in positioning the *comparans* with respect to comparative philosophy, but we must also return to our other significant question: What yield is sought by comparing philosophies, by comparing different cultures' "quest(s) for universality"?

Comparative philosophy and comparative philosophy of religion are intimately tied to *philosophia perennis*, or "perennial philosophy." Asserting the priority of universals in the sphere of comparative studies, and cross-cultural studies at large, presupposes that there are perennial concerns that find articulation in historical languages. Regardless of time, place, or cultural idiom, everyone comes up with the same questions, not to mention varying degrees of the same answers. Certainly, participants both East and West have pursued this course. "Radhakrishnan and others (e.g., Charles A. Moore)," Halbfass rightly notes, "are advocates of a *philosophia perennis*, or of a universal religion, in or behind all particular religions, *which is supposed to emerge as the result of comparative studies in religion and philosophy*" (1988: 424). Here Halbfass explicitly indicates the formal link between comparative philosophy and religion and the motivation to search for a general structure responsible for all historical and positive traditions, that is, a common self. Assuming a metaphysical commitment, comparative philosophy thus expects to yield a comprehensive philosophy that renders cultural idiom transparent. Moore, the initiator of the first East-west Philosophers' Conference held in 1939 at the University of Hawaii, expressly wrote that the purpose of the conference was "to determine the possibility of a world philosophy through the synthesis and ideals of East and West."[11]

[11] Quoted in Clarke (1997: 119–120). Mervyn Sprung also notes in this regard, "The purpose of the conferences [i.e., conferences on comparative philosophy East and West at the University of Hawaii] was to study the possibility of a single, homogeneous world philosophy" (1978: 3).

Openly contesting the pretenses of the so-called perennial philosopher and his philosophy, Mehta argues, "Philosophy is not only… time and context bound but also culture-bound. It is *a delusion*… to believe that there are certain *perennial problems* to which different philosophers, arising at different times, and different places, have given varying answers" (TP 74; emphasis added). Elsewhere, he disparages those "who believe, like Nicolai Hartmann and many contemporary comparativists, that there are 'eternal problems' in philosophy, everywhere and at all times the same, or, with Paul Deussen, that it is the same voice of the Eternal Truth that is heard by thinking spirits everywhere" (HV 221). Notice immediately that "the same voice of the Eternal Truth" effectively preempts the singularity of the other's voice, emasculating the other's claim to truth. That is to say, if the self hears and understands the so-called "voice of the Eternal Truth," then, regardless of the other's singular address, the self already knows what is being said. In this way, perennial voices and concerns thwart the commitment to engaged-dialogue.[12] If the self hears the "voice of the Eternal Truth," then it putatively knows what the other (unaware of this "voice") is saying better than the other knows itself. This resonates directly with Hacker's *chrêsis*, Merleau-Ponty's burden, and Radhakrishnan's Neo-Hindu philosophy. Moreover, and on the political register, the "voice of Eternal Truth" invites either an overt colonialism, or a subtly dangerous relativism whose consequence is political indifference.

Sensing that irreducibly idiosyncratic expression, as well as chance (that is the future, according to Derrida), is structurally precluded from perennial philosophy, Mehta contests, "this school (i.e., Eliade's comparative school) claims to arrive by the study of myth, ritual and symbols at *universal*, *objective*, *synchronic* knowledge about human religiousness, it seems to be pursuing a *chimera*" (BBK 215; emphasis added). For Mehta, cross-cultural encounter and dialogue do not lead to timeless essences, that is, to chimeras, but rather entail reaching "a new horizon of meaning and a new truth" (UT 157). Mehta's insistence on novelty in effect rings the death knell for perennial philosophy, for which novelty is ontologically precluded. In this regard, it would appear that universal, objective, synchronic knowledge attempts an escape from "the movement that is life." Indeed, philosophy, according to Mehta, is an "attempt *to freeze into concepts* and so immobilize what *is* as something present, as *eidos* or as an objective presence in front of us, [it] *can only falsify and distort* our apprehension of *the movement that is life*" (LW 213; emphases added). For this reason, Mehta discerns a certain aporetic element within philosophy: "I am convinced that *there is something chancy within philosophy* and philosophizing itself" (TP 74; emphasis added). If philosophy *is* a *quest for universality*, then chance is its catalyst, as well as its anathema.[13] Philosophy, and by extension comparative

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[12] Halbfass notes in this regard, "If raised to the level of a central and dominating principle, comparison would certainly be incompatible with the dialogic approach which is committed to listening as well as speaking and which does not claim a superior standpoint or an objectifying distance from these processes" (1997c: 298).

[13] I use "catalyst" here in order to employ its denotation as that which instigates a movement that in the end doesn't affect it. That is, chance starts philosophy going but is in no way eradicated by philosophy's peregrinations.

philosophy and comparative philosophy of religion, originates as that which *has not* the possession of the universal. Philosophy's quest, in this regard, lives by the chancy other. For Mehta, cross-cultural encounters are the chancy events that usher in a novelty irreducible to perennial philosophy's universal. Perennial philosophy must, ironically speaking, broaden its horizons by delimiting its horizons. "Comparisons in philosophy cannot be occupied solely with the task of investigating how certain allegedly 'eternal' problems are dealt with in these two traditions [i.e., India and the West]" (HCIW 2).

While certainly denying the perennialist's prejudice, Mehta, all the same, avoids absolutist condemnations of comparison as such. In 1978, he pondered three possible, but unsuitable (because philosophical), agendas in the sphere of comparative studies. He writes, "perhaps… the task of thinking, in the comparative sphere, is not limited to the search for what is common to the thought-content of two different philosophical traditions, or the construction of new concepts overarching them, nor to the quest of [*sic*] motifs in another tradition that may supplement a deficiency in one's own and so 'enrich' it" (HV 221). Consider the structural elements of these "three" possibilities. Mehta first suggests that comparative studies need not be tied to a search for that which the self and the other *already* share, and certainly this accounts for perennial philosophy's prejudice. Second, there need not be a construction of categories that effectively reduce the difference between the two positions, ultimately making their individual moments penultimate. Third, there need not be a colonial conquest of the other and the other's possessions that would in the end serve to enrich the self (a position common to both Neo-Vedānta and Christian *chrêsis*). Though these appear to be *three* possibilities, they are, structurally speaking, the same possibility. Indeed, I submit that all three alleged alternatives share the formal safekeeping of the self. That is to say, all three possibilities ultimately maintain the identity of the (at times supplemented) self. If these three need not be, as Mehta suggests, can a fourth possibility be envisioned? And if this fourth is truly to counter the previous three in their logic, then must not the antagonism issue in the form of a "comparison" wherein the other *destroys* the self?

This last possibility has grave methodological ramifications, or better, grave ramifications for methodology. The encounter with the other, for Mehta, escapes universal description and formal identity, and thus the sphere of comparative philosophy. Mehta affords the other the capacity to completely surprise and thwart the self, which methodology presumably precludes. To be sure, a methodological approach to the other sets out *in advance* the parameters of the encounter. Methodology seemingly answers the crucial questions regarding cross-cultural understanding in advance of the encounter itself. Along these lines, Mehta discerns in Eliade's work a "methodological hermeneutic" that he labels, "strange." He quotes a passage from Eliade: "'In order to begin a valid dialogue with non-European cultures, it is indispensable to know and understand these cultures. Hermeneutics, the science of interpretation, is the Western man's reply… to the demands of contemporary history'" (quoted in WI 180-181). Mehta is suspicious of this "science of interpretation" that apparently precedes the actual dialogue. Mehta wonders how Eliade can understand these other cultures prior to dialoguing with them. "Strange hermeneutics," writes Mehta, "in

which a valid dialogue can begin only after understanding has first been achieved, rather than being the locus or the play-ground in which understanding has its very being" (WI 181). Understanding is not achieved through a disciplined and distanced investigation; rather, "[It] involves a movement of thought that is less like an arrow in flight toward its target," Mehta argues, "than a roving and rambling, a movement to and fro, between two different realms of discourse and vision…. There are no predetermined rules for a game of this kind*, only the playing of the game can generate the rules, **if at all***" (HV 221-222; emphasis and boldface added).[14] Curiously, the lack of methodology becomes itself a certain methodology, a *negative* methodology: "No method, no supra-historical or transcendental point of view is available that can lift us out of this circle of understanding and of our finitude" (PU 271).

The foregoing certainly calls into question not only the capacity to *compare* philosophies, but philosophy itself as a "quest for universality" as well. If we ultimately deny the universal, as Mehta apparently does, then it seems highly dubious to suggest – as perennial philosophy is certainly wont to do – that all cultures are talking about the same thing. The facticity of the self, entailing ontological finitude, precludes such a universal. To this extent, if comparative philosophy is in trouble then would not all forms of comparative studies in one way or another tremble? Panikkar notices at least one significant entailment, and one that we have referenced here: "There is no such thing, strictly speaking, as Comparative Philosophy, and consequently Comparative Philosophy of Religion" (1980: 357).

And yet perhaps in these seemingly serious questions we have already presumed too much. Are we sure that there is even a need for comparative philosophy? Indeed, do cultures outside the European West even have philosophy?[15] Is there any such thing as "Indian philosophy"? To what referent would the signifier "philosophy" refer when supplemented with such an ethnic coefficient? Does the ethnic coefficient in any significant way determine the content of the "base term"? Does an ethnic coefficient tell us anything other than the fact that a mere anthropological type other than the European is thinking philosophically about perennial philosophical problems? In fact, were we to accept the universal achievements of philosophy, it would seem to be a category mistake to suggest such an ethno-philosophy. Galanter intimates something similar when he suggests that Mehta's "Indian-ness" is epiphenom-

[14] Concurring with Mehta, Halbfass states, "We have to detach ourselves from the spell of methodic research and progress. The enigmatic future dialogue with the East… cannot be planned and organized" (1988: 170). Panikkar adds, "If we want to interpret another basically different philosophy we will have to attend the school of that philosophy and immerse ourselves in its universe of discourse as far as possible for us. We will have to overcome our parameters and plunge into *a participatory process* of which we may not be able to foresee the outcome" (1988: 133).

[15] "We cannot be sure," Halbfass provocatively suggests, "whether we are indeed comparing philosophies, or whether we are comparing the Western tradition of philosophy with other traditions which, in spite of all analogies, are ultimately not philosophical traditions" (1988: 433). Countering this hesitation, Mohanty writes, "I believe, the traditional *darśanas* are philosophies, and the difference between Carnap and Heidegger is no lesser than that between Heidegger and Gadadhara" (1997: 165).

enal to his philosophical interests. Is philosophy truly culturally neutral? Or, is to philosophize to participate in a Western horizon regardless of one's ethnic and cultural affiliations? Two prominent Western philosophers address these very questions: Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger.

Husserl argues that the philosophical spirit is unique to the West. The Western spirit ostensibly establishes the *entelechy* of mankind, rendering other cultures, and their intellectual traditions, mere anthropological types. Husserl feels that the European, and in particular Greek, culture had acceded to the universal of pure theory, an accession sure to be followed by other cultures around the world.

> There is something unique here (i.e., Europe) that is recognized in us by all other human groups, too, something that, quite apart from all considerations of utility, becomes a motive for them to Europeanize themselves even in their unbroken will to spiritual self-preservation; whereas we, if we understand ourselves properly, would never Indianize ourselves, for example. I mean that we feel… that an entelechy is inborn in our European civilization which holds sway throughout all the changing shapes of Europe and accords to them the sense of a development toward an ideal shape of life and being as an eternal pole. (1970: 275)[16]

To the extent that Europe has understood the putative *telos* of all peoples, we would seem to have reached the end of history.[17] Husserl's idea/ideal is what other cultures are apparently desirous of, all the while incapable of offering anything truly challenging and commanding of their own. "In this 'Europeanization of the earth,' Edmund Husserl sees the abiding and universal significance of Western 'philosophy' in its Greek origins," Mehta observes, "for it is *this essentially Greek phenomenon* that constitutes the foundation of the rise and development of modern science" (SL 89; emphasis added). For Mehta, of course, Husserl's remarks harbor a Eurocentric intention. "This is world conquest… in the sense of what Husserl called the *Europaisierung der Erde*…. [He] thought of it, with unrelenting optimism, as the entelechy inherent in the Greek origins of the Western philosophical tradition and destined to eventual triumph" (WI 179).

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[16] Husserl also notes, "Today we have a plethora of works about Indian philosophy, Chinese philosophy, etc., in which these are placed on a plane with Greek philosophy and are taken as merely different historical forms under one and the same idea of culture. Naturally, common features are not lacking. Nevertheless, one must not allow the merely morphologically general features to hide the intentional depths so that one becomes blind to the most essential differences of principle. Before everything else the very attitudes of the two sorts of 'philosophers,' their universal directions of interest, are fundamentally different. In both cases one may notice a world-encompassing interest that leads on both sides – thus also in Indian, Chinese, and similar 'philosophies' – to universal knowledge of the world, everywhere working itself out…. But only in the Greeks do we have a universal ('cosmological') life-interest in the essentially new form of a purely 'theoretical' attitude…. These are the men who, not in isolation but with one another and for one another… strive for and bring about *theoria* and nothing but *theoria*…. The theoretical attitude has its historical origin in the Greeks" (1970: 279–280).

[17] Chengyang Li remarks with respect to the East Asian traditions, "Some think that with Confucianism and other major world traditions eventually becoming irrelevant… we may have come to 'the end of history,' that is, humankind will have finally exhausted all viable systematic alternatives to Western liberal ideology" (1999: 1).

While agreeing that cultures outside the West do not have philosophy,[18] Heidegger contests the triumphalism implicit in Husserl's position, a challenge Mehta certainly joins, by suggesting that the Western philosophical tradition is limited and not an overarching accomplishment worthy of such self-congratulations. The theoretical culture so productive in the fields of science and philosophy is for Heidegger a privation of a much fuller experience in the world, an experience laden with the interminable influence of ecstatic time as discussed in Chap. 3. Mehta notes, "unlike Husserl… Heidegger sees this 'complete Europeanization of the earth and of mankind' eating away all substance from things drying up the very wellsprings of reality" (SL 89). Heidegger, of course, does not simply turn his back on the theoretical/scientific culture. Rather, he openly acknowledges the need for *two* types of thought, one philosophical, and thus scientific, the other meditative and reflective.

> Calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself. Calculative thinking is not meditative thinking, not thinking which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is. There are, then, two kinds of thinking, each justified and needed in its own way: calculative thinking and meditative thinking. (1966: 46)

While disagreeing as to the import of the problem, the idea of 'Indian philosophy' is for both Husserl and Heidegger a contradiction in terms. Disclosing the disparity, the idea that there is a particular soil inextricably tied to the universal, philosophical emprise is a "triumph" for Husserl and a long-awaited "delimitation" for Heidegger.

For Mehta, the idea that the universal and its universal culture are irrevocably tied to a provincial horizon, and in this case a Greek horizon, in turn challenges the very idea of the universal. "The culture-bound and to some extent language and region-bound character of specific philosophers cannot be ignored." This delimitation of philosophy as Greek ultimately signifies for Mehta the emancipation of other cultural life-worlds. In explicit reference to Heidegger's extrusion of Western Christian elements from thinking, Mehta writes, "Such liberation of thinking can enable us to look out for the thinking going on in other religious and philosophical traditions" (HV 253). In this respect, Mehta is most certainly not alone. Joseph S. O'Leary similarly argues, "Heidegger is the opposite of a Eurocentric imperialist, for his awareness of the historical contingency of Western ontology clears the path to a radical pluralism of what he calls the 'great beginnings'" (1997: 180). For Mehta, India's was precisely one such "great beginning."

## 4.3 Understanding the Other: Roots and Soil

Recalling his decade-long commitment during the 1970s to a course at Harvard University entitled, "The Problem of Understanding," we now ask with Mehta, what is it exactly that we mean when we talk about understanding the other? I argue that

[18] Heidegger writes, "The style of all Western-European philosophy – and there is no other, neither a Chinese nor an Indian philosophy – is determined by this duality 'beings – in being.'" *What is Called Thinking?* trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 224.

Mehta, in effect, discerns two interpretations of "understanding" in this regard, one seemingly religious, the other philosophical. Disclosing his postcolonial concerns, Mehta explicitly, and polemically, aligns the latter with the West. He writes, "This whole enterprise of 'understanding,' it would seem, is a characteristically Western one" (PIU 121). Sounding a similar note, Halbfass writes, "The attitude of historical research and 'understanding' is a particular way of being *in* the European tradition" (1988: 166). Why is "understanding" a Western/European phenomenon for Mehta (as well as for Halbfass)? Is Western culture synonymous with "understanding"? Could we repeat Heidegger's pronouncement of tautology so that we get "'Western understanding' is tautologous"? Perhaps there is complicity between the philosophical project and understanding. What does it mean, "to understand," if we are to understand "understanding" as characteristically Western?

Philosophical/Western understanding, for Mehta, is tied to issues of colonial power. "Most of what goes on in our academic work…" writes Mehta, "is a form of… *understanding* as an *instrument* of the will-to-power… which is meant to *entrap and dominate* other human groups, whether belonging to other traditions or to the excluded other in one's own" (PU 271; emphases added). Mehta argues further that philosophical thinking understood as "metaphysical and scientific thinking about essents" "is dominated by… the quest of certainty, of thinking as a kind of grasping and taking secure possession of its object through conceptualization" (HD 47-48). Here Mehta again ties philosophy directly to a "quest"; but notice that here the "quest" is no longer innocuously wedded to a search for an innocent universal, but rather is immediately linked to a politically aggressive possession that would putatively buttress the security of the self. In this regard, Mehta rhetorically asks, "Is there something in the modern *Western* concept of knowing… that prevents it from letting the other be, which transforms it into an object and thus takes possession of it, which permits no inappropriable mystery in things, in persons, in other cultural and religious traditions, no otherness which is not at the knowing subject's disposal?" (BBK 212).

"Western understanding," as Mehta conceives it here, is the colonizing acquisition of the other's putative essence. While Mehta writes polemically of the Western tradition, he is of course cognizant of similar projects within classical India. Mehta suggests, as we saw above, that the popular non-dual Vedānta often subsumed the other in the name of Brahman. "There is, above all, the idea of Being (Brahman-Ātman) as the ground of all, that appears to offer an interesting point for comparison and contrast, for this is the basic concept of the metaphysical tradition and in Vedānta it is even more emphatically crucial" (HV 243-244). Thus we can think here not only of the Christian's *chrêsis* but also the Neo-Hindu's reduction of, for example, the provincial traditions in India associated with the villages and the Tantras. "Understanding," as Mehta understands it, emasculates the challenge to the self that is the other *as* other.[19] By philosophically understanding the other, the self allegedly

[19] Metaphorically speaking, and according to Emanuel Levinas, *philosophical* understanding is an antihistamine: "Western philosophy coincides with the disclosure of the other where the other, in manifesting itself as a being, loses its alterity. From its infancy philosophy has been struck with a horror of the other that remains other – with an insurmountable allergy" (1986: 346).

overcomes the threatening distance between itself and the other through the possession of the concept, the universal. In this way, the other does not challenge, but edifies, that is to say, the other adds to the totality: the other is a means to an *enrichment* of self.[20] Again citing Merleau-Ponty, Mehta notes:

> Merleau-Ponty adds… "Yet the fact remains that *the West* has invented an idea of truth which requires and *authorizes it to understand other cultures*, and thus to recover them as *aspects of a total truth*." As a "historical entelechy" and as itself a historical creation, the West is "committed to the onerous task of understanding other cultures." (WI 177; emphasis added)

As indicated, I believe it is Merleau-Ponty's language that interests Mehta here. Notice that Merleau-Ponty speaks of "recovery" and "aspects of a total truth." I propose that in Mehta's model of the pilgrim (to be addressed below), we find the explicit refutation of the metaphysics implicit in "recovery" and "aspects of a total truth." For Merleau-Ponty, it would appear that the other is a lost element within a whole. The other is precisely not a moment of dialogical novelty, but simply a corroboration as well as reparation of the fragmented totality.[21]

Understanding, philosophically conceived according to Mehta, maintains the *supplemented* identity of the philosophical subject. In this respect, the philosophical subject, I propose, is never truly challenged. In fact, examining the spatial metaphor in under-standing, we see that to understand the other is not only to find out what stands under the other, e.g., the ground of the other, but also it is to stand under the whole operation, that is, out of play. The one who stands under does not engage in risky dialogue. Here we sense a convergence with Michel Foucault's "panopticon."[22] As Foucault points out, the guard in the penal tower occupies a position out of play. The panopticon allows the guard to monitor the activities of the inmates without in turn being observed. In a mere inversion of the spatial metaphor, "Western understanding" in effect re-inscribes the logic of the panopticon. The self who understands stands under/stands above. In the philosophical enterprise of understanding, the *comparans* is out of play, unquestioned, privileged, utilizing 'understanding' as an

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[20] Eliot Deutsch explicitly states in this regard:

> We are aware now that there is much of intrinsic philosophical value and interest in Asian thought…. Students ought to be able to study Asian philosophy simply for the purpose of *enriching* their philosophical background and enabling them to deal better with the philosophical problems that interest them. Without losing sight of the distinctive and sometimes unique characteristics of a tradition one ought to be able to concentrate on a tradition as it is a response to a series of universal questions and problems. (1969: preface [no page number given])

[21] "The relation to the 'other' is, therefore, a self-relation," writes Taylor, "that is self-transforming. The 'other' is not really other but is actually a *moment* in one's self-becoming" (1990: 131).

[22] As the components of the word itself indicate, the panopticon has to do with all (pan) – seeing (optics). The panopticon, originally introduced by Jeremy Bentham, was a design for a prison in which the guard, hidden behind a screen (like a two-way mirror), can observe the inmates without in turn being observed.

instrument of a 'will-to-power.' In this regard, I believe Mehta would agree with Taylor when he writes, "speculative philosophy… aspires to panopticism" (1987: 122). To be sure, "The *Western scholar*," argues Mehta, "seeks to *understand*, *without being religiously involved*, material which to him is alien" (HT 115; emphasis added).[23]

To such a *philosophical* position out of play, Mehta counters with his insistence on the rootedness of the self: factical roots soil the self. Mehta deploys the themes of "roots" and "soil," I suggest, to delimit specifically claims to universality. Mehta's "soil" thus cultivates a subtle scatological implication. That is to say, Mehta not only roots "universal culture," "[he] was concerned with the idea of the rootedness of philosophical thought in a cultural matrix" (Jackson 1992: 1); he also soils, that is dirties, contaminates, the so-called neutral purity of eternal ideas and problems. Arguing with reference to Heidegger's "A Dialogue on Language," Mehta writes in this regard, "this dialogue between Heidegger and a Japanese scholar brings home the need of extreme caution in every kind of 'comparative' philosophizing and in the employment of Western metaphysical terms to express ideas *rooted* in another linguistic *soil*" (PMH, fn526). Here Mehta's "soil" is specifically the linguistico-cultural matrix in which all "ideas" have their limited roots. "Philosophical claims to universality, not only in individual thinkers but also in entire traditions are themselves *rooted* in presupposed particularities of vision" (UT 136).

Mehta's use of "soil" and "roots" thus demands a thorough consideration of all thought (including philosophy) as irreducibly historical, traditional, and thus finite. Mehta contends that the world's religions and philosophies all originate with guiding words and concepts that are necessarily determinative in one way rather than another. "At the beginning of each of the great religious traditions," writes Mehta, "stands a body of writings, or orally transmitted mass of words, which sends off the tradition on the voyage in time" (PU 273). The "great religious traditions," the "great beginnings" for Mehta, all point back to their singular "Ur-dichtungs." There are linguistic disparities; there are cultural disparities. Traditions, like Dasein, are guilty. "The basic words and ultimate concepts in which, about which, and around which the philosophizing of a people or culture is carried on," Mehta argues, "…are fatefully determinative, in the last resort, of the way of being, seeing and doing characteristic of a people's life and their historical existence, as also of the experience and relationship to other cultures" (BNB 83). And there's the problem: vernacular concepts are *fatefully determinative* of a particular culture's Dasein. After all,

[23] According to John D. Caputo, this *is* the metaphysical desire: "The metaphysical desire for 'pure act' is the desire for a preying that is not preyed upon, for absolute eagle-like preying… for a consuming that is not vulnerable to being consumed" (1993b: 200). [It may be of interest to know that Mehta and Caputo knew each other and in fact Mehta references Caputo's work on Eckhart and Heidegger – see HV 251.] D. Krishna also argues that this is the dominant trend in cross-cultural encounter between the West and its others: "To adopt a well-known expression from Sartre, all nonwestern cultures have been reduced to the status of 'objects' by being observed and studied by western scholars in terms of western concepts and categories, which are not treated as culture-bound but as universal in character" (1988: 78).

"Transcendence always remains relative to the particulars which constitute its point of departure" (UT 136). Elsewhere Mehta writes, "One may say that *Brahman* and *Atman* are the ground-words of the Indian tradition, not just words or concepts, but the very embodiment of that primordial unhiddenness in the light of which the Indian mind thenceforth breathed and thought, its very spiritual destiny" (HCIW 4).

Here, of course, we see Mehta's employment of Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Any position that refuses this interminable contamination by native soil presents an "*image* of a disenchanted, de-mystified and rationalized world which is only a reflection of the historically generated, subjectivistic prejudice against our own *rootedness* in the past and the naivete of our presumption to have elevated ourselves *above* the *concrete* historical *flow* of life *and* thought" (UT 155; emphasis added). This "subjectivistic prejudice," according to Mehta, eventually betrays its naiveté. Pretending to absolute initiation, and thus authorship, subjectivism holds fast to Kant's injunction. Assuming absolute authorship, the allegedly enlightened self structurally precludes the provocateur; it philosophically understands itself to be the autonomous point of initiation. "A total disregard of traditional contexts (of the fact that problems and theories are not only embedded in a matrix of tradition but also arise from and presuppose this matrix) can only result in the kind of naiveté which it is precisely the business of philosophy to overcome" (HCIW 6).

The disparity in vernacular being in effect sustains an incommensurability, engendering the *infinite* task of translation/interpretation/understanding. Indeed, if the privileged position of Western, not to mention Neo-Vedāntin, universality is denied, recalling not only Nietzsche's (in)famous proclamation of God's death, but also the entire edifice of Heideggerian (and to some extent Gadamerian) hermeneutics, then the vernacular concept presumed to be a mere idiom reducible to a perennial concern becomes thick, opaque, irreducibly complex. As that which allegedly stood behind, and ultimately explained, the merely anthropological appearance falls away, the presumed superficiality of the appearance becomes thick with meaning and context.[24] Precisely in this way, understanding the other becomes particularly problematic.

The paradox here is that, in the apparent moment of absolute loss, i.e., the loss of perennial philosophy's universal, Merleau-Ponty's "totality," the soiled self is exposed to a hyperbolic gain: the "individual situation is always *more complicated*." With the death of the universal, the vernacular other becomes infinitely complex.[25] Have we not here an explicit nod towards irreducible plurality? "The Brahman-Atman of the

[24] Caputo notes in this regard, "The universal never quite fits, can never quite be fitted into the concrete. The individual situation is always *more complicated* and it is never possible to anticipate, to have in advance, the idiosyncrasies of the particular, never possible to prepare the universal for the disruptiveness of the singular" (1993a: 203–204).

[25] Derrida (1978).

Upaniṣads," Mehta argues, "is not the same as the Being of Western thought; they are different starting points… *they are untranslatable one by the other*" (HV 258, emphasis added).[26] There *is* a gulf between these "Ur-words." Though the morphology of "Ur-word" suggests that we have in fact risen beyond the disparity of "Brahman" and "Being," we must not forget that morphological studies are secondary to the vernacular denotation that is always already implied by any one word's vernacular context. "Family, society, and state" always determine the subject matter first and foremost. "If you take the basic terms within a culture, and compare them with the basic terms of other cultures, you will not find many close correspondences. *Each term will be different*" (LW 229; emphasis added). Totality *is* precluded.[27]

The real task of cross-cultural encounter, of understanding the cultural other, for Mehta, is thus the initial task of finding the right words that belong to "our soil" that correctly resonate with what the other is saying. Recalling that Mehta does not condemn comparative projects as such, we now read:

> The real problems and authentic questions of comparative philosophy arise from the actual work done during its implicit phase, that is, during the course of translating, expounding and discussing the ancient and classical Indian philosophical texts by Western scholars, or when Indian scholars engage in similar work with Western texts, in an Indian language, and with the resources of their conceptual and linguistic heritage at their command. (HCIW 5-6)

Thus, when it comes to crossing cultural boundaries (as nebulous as the category may be), the language used must be examined carefully. For instance, Mehta argues that "the terms belief and knowledge… are proper to one particular group of religious traditions and it is by no means certain that they are adequate to the self-understanding of others" (BBK 203-204). For Mehta, as we will see below, it is precisely the translation of Indian texts, in the colonial and postcolonial periods, that fails to do justice to these pressing hermeneutic issues. Too often the cross-cultural dialogue breaks down due to an insufficient patience with problems of translation. In this way, Mehta criticizes the assumption that language courses and trips to, say, India for a couple of years will serve the purpose. He feels that more often than not the use of the other's language is ultimately an exportation of familiar concepts into an exotic idiom. He writes:

> One 'speech community' understands another, I make bold to say, to the extent to which it learns *to live* in the same 'house of words' as the other. This is not just a question of scholarship nor, to use an expression much in favour these days, of 'dialogue.' This has mostly been an ill disguised monologue in which one partner is bilingual and the other (the initiator of the dialogue) knows *or is at home in only one language*, his own mother tongue….

[26] Here of course we see Mehta qualify his earlier consideration of the similarity between the Being of the Western tradition and the Brahman-Ātman of the Indian.

[27] Panikkar points out in this regard: "Pluralism does not allow of any supersystem or metaphilosophy. Pluralism is not concerned with multiplicity or diversity as such, but with the incommensurability of human constructs on homologous issues. The problem of pluralism touches the limits of the intelligible (not just for us but in itself). It poses the greatest challenge to the human spirit. It touches the shores of the ineffable and thus of silence" (1988: 130).

> It does not make a big difference in this state of affairs if X has taken a few courses in Hindi in his home country or spent a couple of years in north India. What he sees in my speech is his own mirror image, reflected back to him in my words, an image enframed in a suitably exotic and 'native' context. (PU 274)[28]

I find Mehta's prose telling. As an example of the illusion of cross-cultural dialogue, Mehta points to the "dialogue" between specifically Hindi/north India and the West (this is clear in the larger context of the passage). Curiously, who is the agent here? It is the colonial, Western traveler. Agency, for Mehta, seems to rest with the Hindi self's other. That is, Mehta is the bilingual one in whom the dialogue's initiator sees his "mirror image." Mehta's is the "suitably exotic and 'native' context." Structurally speaking, the Western self apparently initiates a monologue wherein the other's alterity is neglected in favor of a familiar horizon, anticipating, and thus preempting, the other.[29] Mehta, citing Eliade's "The will properly to understand the 'other' is rewarded by an *enrichment* of the Western consciousness," contends:

> The "other" here… is still part of the Western dream, for which hermeneutics is also a *science* of interpretation, an effective instrument for decoding, unmasking and mastering an unconscious, anxiety-generating content, in the manner of psychoanalysis and a means of achieving cultural totality, if not wholeness, by assimilating the other as an element in a total dream image. (WI 174; emphasis added)

Through the encounter with the other, the Western self is *enriched* and thus reaffirmed according to Mehta, a reaffirmation that relieves the self's anxiety. Here of course we can recall from the previous chapter the discussion of anxiety resulting from the recognition that one is implicated in the contingent game of time. But notice that here, and in addition to the vicissitudes of time, we now see that it is also cultural disparity that ushers in anxiety. It would appear that the ill-disguised monologue is a defense against anxiety-provoking, cultural alterity. That is to say, the recognition of the cultural other *as* other leads to a recognition of the anxiety-provoking contingency of one's own cultural achievements. In this way, the other's soil apparently dirties not only the other, but indirectly the self as well. Cross-cultural others soil each other. Is there then an alternative to this philosophical enterprise of understanding/domesticating/reducing the other?

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[28] Here Mehta refers to the "ill-disguised monologue" in 1988, but this idea had crossed his mind as early as 1968 when he speaks of turning "the monologue of the past into a real dialogue" (PIU 122).

[29] D. Krishna, like many postcolonial critics, similarly puts the onus on the West: "In a deep and radical sense… it is only the West that has arrogated to itself the status of subjecthood in the cognitive enterprise, reducing all others to the status of objects" (1988: 78). Halbfass ostensibly agrees, "Traditional Hinduism has not reached out for the West. It has not been driven by the zeal of proselytization and discovery, and by the urge to understand and master foreign cultures. India has discovered Europe and begun to respond to it in being overrun and objectified by it" (1988: 437). Taylor adds, "The West converses with itself while pretending to listen to someone/something other" (1990: 144).

## 4.4 Pilgrims and Cross-Cultural Pilgrimage

As witnessed in the previous chapter, Gadamer's hermeneutics thoroughly details the relationship to the provocative other. Here of course we can locate part of Mehta's interest in Gadamer. Yet Mehta, in his final public address, discloses his turning away from specifically *philosophical* hermeneutics. Mehta explicitly states, "I am not sure now about the direct applicability of philosophical hermeneutics to the question of inter-religious understanding" (PU 275).[30] Having spent nearly three decades in the field of philosophical hermeneutics, why does Mehta question its applicability to "inter-religious understanding"? How are we to understand this seemingly unexpected turn? Mehta explains, "the principal value of philosophical hermeneutics seems to me to lie in clarifying the nature of *self*-understanding rather than in the understanding of others" (PU 275; emphasis added). This is most significant. For Mehta, *philosophical* hermeneutics culminates in *self*-understanding. Notice also that Mehta here explicitly juxtaposes philosophical hermeneutics with "inter-*religious* understanding." If philosophical hermeneutics concerns itself with "*self*-understanding," it would seem that "inter-religious understanding" would by contrast be an "*other*-understanding." As we saw above, philosophy, for Mehta, more often than not serves the concerns of the self. For this reason, "All dialogue, aiming at mutual understanding between peoples on a philosophical level," Mehta contends, "is open to the danger of lapsing into inauthenticity, of becoming spurious and a pretense… it is necessary to focus on a common matter and task rather than on each other" (WC 263). Elsewhere he writes, "It is only when we speak from… concrete points of view that we save our talk from running into abstract generalities, evading the real issues that confront us, and come to grips with the actual and the problematic" (PIU 114). Abstract, philosophical generalities fail the actual issues concerning the encounter between singular others.

Talk of understanding the other *as such* quickly lapses into noumenal abstractions. There is not a universal Other as such; there are only vernacular others. Dallmayr notices a similar distinction when he writes with respect to Herder, "What differentiates Herder's multicultural and multitemporal attentiveness from Kantian ethics is his insistence on rescuing the 'ends' principle from its noumenal abstraction and inserting it into the thick of ongoing historical experience, in which he is *not so much a 'transcendental spectator' as an engaged participant*" (1998: 40, emphasis added). Instead of the philosophically prescribed method of the straight and narrow course, a prescription for a noumenal journey in which the interlocutor

[30] Though Mehta often critiques Eliade for his "universalizing" tendencies, I believe he approvingly cites the following from Eliade: "For the encounter – or shock – between civilizations is always, in the last resort, an encounter between spiritualities – between religions" (quoted in WI 180). In this way, and as will be examined below, Mehta questions the applicability of philosophical hermeneutics to inter-religious understanding that is, by extension, cross-cultural encounter as such.

is more a "transcendental spectator" than an "engaged participant," Mehta insists, "The *wayfaring* of an individual through the *limited* span of his life, of a people through history or of humankind itself into the *unforeseeable* future, these… are *pilgrimages*" (PU 273; emphasis added).

Mehta's model for encountering the other is one guided not by the philosophical concept of universality and totality but rather the religious trope of *pilgrimage*. He writes, "Setting aside for the moment learned and bookish models for religious understanding, I would like to suggest the model of a pilgrimage as more appropriate and helpful" (PU 275). Here in his last public address, Mehta returns in fact to a theme that we first see in his 1976 piece, "Beyond Believing and Knowing." I propose that Mehta in effect opposes "religious understanding" to the philosophical understanding appended earlier to Western culture. Opposing philosophy's search for self, pilgrimage is ostensibly the understanding of the other. Is this in fact the case? Metha writes:

> It [i.e., understanding] must itself be viewed and practiced as a *religious* activity, *not for the sake of mastery* but as a form of *mutuality and self-subordination*. So regarded, and only so, will it shed the arrogance which often marks the enterprise of understanding the other, when togetherness slides into an objectification of the other, and the other is 'comprehended', held in one's grasp, *from a vantage point of superiority and eventually mastered*. (PU 269, emphasis added)

Notice Mehta's use of "vantage point of superiority." This resonates directly with our earlier discussion of the *comparans* and the panopticon. For Mehta, a philosophical conversation bent on each other as such lapses into a will to power, "for the sake of mastery." Philosophical understanding looks past the "facticity" of concrete cultural life in favor of noumenal abstractions that not only evade the common task but also take possession of the other. In contrast to philosophy's objectification and mastery, religious understanding apparently involves "mutuality and *self-subordination*." In this way, Mehta suggests a subtle tension regarding an equitable self in mutuality while simultaneously affording the other his asymmetry. I propose that the "self-subordination" of Mehta's pilgrimage runs directly counter to the "self-edification" tied to philosophical hermeneutics. *Religious* understanding inverts *philosophical* understanding. But what exactly is this (inter-)religious understanding that attends to the common matter?

Pilgrimage, for Mehta, ultimately entails foregoing the philosophical need to domesticate. Pilgrimage in effect surrenders philosophy's project of rendering the other transparent. The pilgrim neither anticipates nor reduces the other to a recovered totality. Recalling our earlier discussion concerning the a-methodological character of cross-cultural encounter, Mehta suggests that pilgrimage is an *Irregang*, or errant journey. He writes, "Human religiousness… is a pilgrimage, not the holding true of certain propositions about the world and what transcends it, and not the holding fast to certain ways of symbolizing man's longing for the Infinite. As an *Unterwegssein*, it is necessarily an *Irregang*" (BBK 206). Mehta explicitly contrasts here religious pilgrimage with the philosophical spirit characterized as the determined maintenance of true and certain propositions, as well as the dogmatic embrace of assured symbolizations.

Human religiousness, that is, Mehta's pilgrimage is other to certain propositions and symbolizations. Pilgrimage in this way embraces uncertainty. Pilgrimage/religion embraces chance.[31] Mehta, in his own exemplification of cross-cultural encounter/pilgrimage, errantly crosses cultures and joins "pilgrimage" not only to German philosophical language, but to Sanskrit/Hindi as well: the *pilgrimage* is an *Unterwegssein* that is an *Irregang* passing through *tīrthas*.[32] "Understanding then would be a pilgrimage towards oneself, *others* being *tīrthas*, the *sacred* places one *passes through* on one's way to the final destination" (PU 273; emphasis added). The other, for the pilgrim, is precisely not an object for investigation, but rather a sacred place en route to the final destination, that is, "oneself." Here we must pause and inquire into what appears to be an inconsistency. Was it not philosophy's task to reach self-understanding? Does Mehta not explicitly contrast philosophy and religion precisely with respect to self-understanding and understanding of others? He writes, "These questions [are] not just abstract problems pertaining to the academic pursuit called comparative religion… but part of a continuing effort at *self*-understanding" (PU 268). I propose that for Mehta the self that is understood through philosophy is not the same self that is understood through religion, and the difference between the two ultimately rests with the difference in the relationship obtaining between self and other in philosophical as opposed to religious relationship.

The *Unterwegssein* is a "being on the way," while the *Irregang* qualifies this "being on the way" as an "errant journey." Significantly, Mehta points to the dynamism of pilgrimage rather than to some static essence that *is* the pilgrim. Mehta calls the pilgrim's pilgrimage an *Irregang* precisely because along this journey anticipations, or initiatives, that may guide the self are themselves ultimately *destroyed*. In fact, the self, as intimately tied to initiative, is itself destroyed through pilgrimage. Mehta argues, "Idols must be set up and idols must be broken, these same idols, *our own, not those of others*… without the final perception of these symbols, including those called concepts, and of our very belongingness to a tradition, as *idols to be discarded*, down to the very last, there can be no arrival, no homecoming" (BBK 206-207; emphasis added). Ironically, "homecoming" and "arrival" here resonate directly with the decimation of self and home. Pilgrimage, for Mehta, is thoroughly iconoclastic. Precisely for this reason, I propose that Mehta's pilgrimage represents a *postcolonial* hermeneutics.

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[31] While Mehta is working with a distinction between the acquisitive, colonial spirit of philosophy and the self-subordinating spirit of religion, this sort of distinction has been consistently eroded in much late twentieth-century Continental philosophy. To be sure, many Continental authors, e.g., Derrida, Vattimo, Levinas, Caputo, and Taylor, have brought at least postmodern philosophy and religion into direct contact, if not in fact assimilation. I would like to thank Joseph Prabhu for reminding me of this rapprochement.

[32] Elsewhere Mehta discusses pilgrimage and the *tīrtha* as destination: "Among the *tīrthas* to which pious Hindus have aspired to make a pilgrimage once at least in their lifetime is Gangotri, the source of mother Gaṅgā" (HT 111). Though Mehta references here empirical pilgrimages, I once again propose that his work on pilgrims and pilgrimages resonates on a theoretical level, "pilgrim" and "pilgrimage" serving as tropes (a topic to which I return in Chap. 6).

Opposing the repeated comments concerning the *enrichment* of the self via the hermeneutic encounter with the other, Mehta often points to the resultant destruction.[33] This shift of emphasis reflects, I submit, the empirical experience of the colonized, an element within the life-world of Hindus and significantly not that of Western Europeans. For instance, Mehta writes, "But the major task which these attempts subserve is that of understanding how the Hindu life-world has been *violently altered* by India's entry into modernity in the early nineteenth century…. [T]he crucial problem is an examination of the *cataclysmic change* in the religious foundations of our old conception of social and political order" (LW 220; emphasis added). Certainly, "violently altered" and "cataclysmic change" do not carry the same conservative connotations as "enrichment" and "edification." Elsewhere he writes, characterizing the history of South Asia religious history: "the most dramatic changes and ruptures in their religious history – of which *the continuity and unity is all but lost from view*" (HT 105-106; emphasis added). Moreover, "In the world of today, in this one world of 'world-civilization,' our relationship to tradition is an *irreparably broken* one" (HV 261; emphasis added); "Our relation to tradition can *no longer be one of conservation* alone" (PIU 128; emphasis added); "The Hindu intellectual… has… witnessed and participated in… a *catastrophic alteration* in his traditional life-world during the last half century" (LW 216; emphasis added). I propose that Mehta's conspicuous emphasis on loss and rupture rather than gain and enrichment as witnessed here indicates a subtle shift in hermeneutic focus, a shift particularly reflective of the postcolonial predicament.[34] In this way, Mehta counters philosophical hermeneutics' *Bildung* with his own postcolonial hermeneutics' loss. The irony for the pilgrim, in contrast to the perennial philosopher, is that homecoming through pilgrimage is a ruinous destination. Thus while both Gadamer and Mehta speak of a journey out to the other with an immanent return – a centripetal trajectory essential to hermeneutics as such – it would appear that the former's destination is enriched while the latter's is irreparably broken.

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[33] On this very point, Mehta offers contradictory statements. Sometimes Mehta seems to endorse the enriching aspects of cross-cultural encounter while at other times he highlights rupture and dislocation. I propose that Mehta's postcolonial facticity requires a final nod toward rupture. This is a point that we will return to in Chap. 6.

[34] Mehta's postcolonial hermeneutics anticipates some of Gananath Obeyesekere's critiques of Gadamer: "Cultural consciousness for most of us involves a two-fold *critical* attitude. Often when we write about another culture there is an implied critique of it – sometimes we cannot handle this well. There is also another critique: a critique of one's own culture and traditions. This is, I believe, a very important part of our discipline – or should be – and must supplement the conservative notion of Gadamer's view of one's historical consciousness…. In studying another society it is the idea of 'cultural consciousness' that must supplement Gadamer's notion of… the 'fusion of horizons" (1990: 274). To this Obeyesekere appends the following footnote: "A crucial notion in Gadamer is the 'fusion of horizons,' a special dialectical process whereby a text belonging to the past is fused with the scholar's own horizon, itself a product of his tradition and his historical placement and consciousness. *Fusion of horizons in this sense is appropriate when the text belongs to one's own tradition, but this model of the text is inadequate for studying an alien culture*. Here, I believe, one must *resist* the fusion of horizons and try as best one can to restore in one's work the integrity of alien life-forms" (1990: 317, fn. 85, emphasis added).

The pilgrim, for Mehta, is undeniably factical: the pilgrim is always already rooted in one linguistico-cultural soil rather than another. The pilgrim sets out from this familiar soil on a journey towards the other as *tīrtha*. Along the journey, other sojourners join the pilgrim: "The difference in the languages they speak, as in other things, hardly prevents them from making themselves understood. Recognizing and respecting these differences, they yet arrive at an understanding which goes deeper than words" (PU 276). What exactly is an understanding that goes deeper than words? Is not language the house of Being? Do we revisit here Mehta's sense that what self and other share eludes the conceptual grasp of both? Is the common matter ironic? Unlike philosophical understanding, the pilgrim's pilgrimage involves the destruction of its *own* idols, symbols, and concepts. Pilgrimage destroys the self's philosophy. The encounter with the other is no longer explicitly the destruction of the other's native context, but rather, one's own. The philosophical hermeneutic "miracle" is thereby significantly reversed in Mehta's postcolonial hermeneutics: the *other* is not brought back to *life*, rather the (metaphysical) *self* is given *death*. I propose that it is this decimation of self that goes deeper than words. Yet, and curiously, Mehta suggests that some undertake a pilgrimage "to understand and experience the meaning of their lives, and of what remains to give completion to their pilgrimage through life, to be able to give the very name of a pilgrimage to their lives" (PU 276). Notice that Mehta's language here suggests that the pilgrimage makes the pilgrim complete. Mehta, in fact, writes, "this last act [i.e., pilgrimage] fills up a lack" (PU 276). This is most significant. How is it that the *destruction* of one's *own* idols and concepts fills up a lack?

I submit that for Mehta life becomes whole, overcomes its lack, by ironically overcoming its denial of lack. The pilgrim achieves his pilgrimage by embracing his own incompletion, that is, the death of his presumed plenitude of being. Recall, pilgrimage is always *on the way* (*Unterwegssein*). The pilgrim foregoes its assured symbols, its reassuring philosophy, that is, its *quest* for universality. To this extent, the pilgrim, like Dasein (or should we say, *as* Dasein), exists through its not yet. "Not until living itself is transformed into a *pilgrimage*, which is nothing if not *living in the face of death*, *one's own*, does Scripture disclose its sovereign majesty, become truly Scripture" (PU 276-277; emphasis added). Pilgrimage *is* living in the face of one's own death. Insofar as the pilgrim embraces his pilgrimage, he is embraces his death.[35] "What is understanding among people worth if it does not take place *in full awareness of our common mortality*, common yet beckoning to each of us to meet it alone, in the privacy of our solitary pilgrimages" (PU 276; emphasis added).

[35] In this way, it would appear that Mehta's philosophy of religion joins other postmodern philosophies of religion. In its open acceptance of death, Mehta's philosophy contests for example the death-denying tactics (according to Taylor) of Hegel's philosophy: "The negation of the negation domesticates any difference that is not an identity and every other that is not the same. This double negativity, which is the logical structure of the concept, is, in effect, a process of amortization intended to negate the most disturbing difference and overcome the most unsettling other – death" (Taylor 1987: 32).

Cultural others share a common matter/mortality, and it is precisely our mortality that escapes our *conceptual grasp*. Accordingly, the *tīrtha* towards which the errant pilgrim undertakes his pilgrimage is the other as death, a common mortality. That is to say, the self in the face of the irreducible other is formally incomplete. The self is contingent and as such is, can we not now say, *fatally* determined. The other as *tīrtha*, as irreducible other, points to the structural/conceptual incompletion of the self. The self is the other's other. In this way, Mehta's themes in the last year of his life resonate with themes he addresses in his 1962 dissertation. In *The Philosophy of Martin Heidegger*, Mehta writes, "Dasein is infected with an ever present incompleteness, which cannot be annulled and which finds its end in death…. The not-yet of Dasein… is not merely not accessible to experience but is itself non-existent and refers to something that Dasein, lacking it, has to become" (PMH 229).

Such structural incompletion, however, is not to be bemoaned. In fact, it is such incompletion that affords the space for self-transcendence, for being on the way and not having already arrived. "It is this self-transcending movement…inherent in man, which defines him as *homo religiosus*, a *bridge* thrown across, from the realm of the visible to another shore" (BBK 203). The religious self is the moving self, the incomplete self. Elsewhere Mehta writes, "Liminality is the mode of existence of present-day man, who has his sojourn (pilgrimage?) in a region where civilizations, cultures and religions touch each other… the experience of being a bridge" (WC 263). "Present-day man," according to Mehta, exists in a confluence of civilizations, cultures and religions, (in)terminably provoked by others. After all, "In the world of today… thinking is determined by an unheard-of simultaneity of times and places, all equally remote, all equally close" (HV 261). Such provocation points ultimately to the (non-) essence of the self. That is to say, the self is religious precisely to the extent that it is thrown into self-transcendence, a transcendence afforded by that of which it is not the initiator, that is, the other shore, the *tīrtha*. The self's structure is such that it *is* movement, tropically marked here by the figure of a bridge; the self, the pilgrim, *is Unterwegssein*, 'on the way.' The irreducible opacity of the other, of death, ironically guarantees that the pilgrim is always already on the bridge, on the way to the other shore. Considering our "common mortality" on a political register, and again betraying his empirical concerns, Mehta notes, "Today it is this sense of loss that alone can bring the legatees of great civilizations together" (WC 258). Significantly, Mehta anticipates here the work of the preeminent legal theorist and social philosopher Martha Nussbaum. To be sure, Nussbaum similarly writes, "Liberal respect for human equality… must be sustained by an emotional development that understands humanity as a condition of shared incompleteness" (2004: 16).

Only the loss of the transcendental, of the essential (which in effect is the ironic gain of mortality), can truly bring world cultures together according to Mehta. The legatees of great civilizations share "that which escapes the conceptual grasping of either of us" (WI 184). This is precisely the fourth possibility of comparative studies alluded to above. Indeed, comparison does not lead to a more encompassing unity; the self and the other are not lifted up into that which they both positively share. Rather, self and other come to share their structural incompletion. "Comparative philosophy… would be… *the awareness of the particularity and contingency of*

***one's own** linguistic-conceptual world* made possible through encounter and acquaintance with another" (HCIW 6; emphasis and boldface added). The pilgrim comes home to its soiled contingency. Mehta, in fact, writes of the recognition of mortality as "the possibility of that awesome experience" (HV 234). Life, for Mehta, is properly a pilgrimage. The pilgrim sojourns religiously, that is errantly, poetically. "Homecoming in this sense," notes Dallmayr, "means not nostalgic return but openness to an untapped promise – the promise of fresh encounters in the calm of spiritual years" (1993: 180).

The time has come to draw attention to another particular trope that underwrites several of Mehta's statements (not to mention a good bit of twentieth century theory in general). He speaks of the Western philosophical tradition and its failure to notice an unthought *opacity*. He also speaks of philosophy and its *image*, as well as philosophy being grounded in *presupposed particularities of vision*. Mehta writes of going back and forth between two realms, i.e., *discourse* and *vision*, the movement into the "*unforeseeable* future," as well as the "realm of the *visible*." For Mehta, as it most certainly is for Heidegger, *vision* is *the* philosophic sense. Heidegger writes in this regard, "From the beginning onwards the tradition of philosophy has been oriented primarily towards 'seeing' as a way of access to entities *and to Being*" (BT 187). Thus, and significantly, Mehta characterizes the future as the "unforeseeable," and the other shore as beyond vision. Yet what precisely is "beyond vision," what is an "unthought opacity," an "unforeseeable future"?

One reading of "vision/visible" suggests that its opposite is the presently invisible, or perhaps a "future-visible," that is, that which for the moment is hidden but fully capable of being revealed, and therefore seen, once one gets to the other shore (assuming of course that the other shore is in fact reachable). There is, however, another sense to the opposite of vision/visible, and one certainly more in keeping with Mehta's position. The opposite of the visible is not simply the future visible; it is rather what the self/philosophy can *never see*. The true opposite of the trope of vision and the visible, for Mehta, is not the future-visible, but the *auditory/discourse*. It is the other's address that lies on the other shore; a vernacular address the self cannot anticipate, initiate, see, or dominate. After all, "all essential dialogue is at bottom not something that goes on between men as subjects, masters of language, but between one language and another" (WC 260). In this transcendence, "an element of *mystery* remains, as it does when we seek to understand a person as a person, *not seeking control over him* but *being with* him, as *ineluctably a mystery* as anyone we love can be" (PU 270; emphases added). The other, the *tīrtha* always retains an element of mystery. The other shore, the opposite of the visible, is precisely that of which the self cannot form an exhausting image, conceptually or otherwise. For Mehta, through understanding, "otherness is overcome, to *some* degree," a sure challenge to any exhaustive fusion of horizons.

In encountering the other, the self and other may reach a mutual understanding. But of significance for Mehta is the sense that, even through mutuality, the other still commands a mysterious element and thus remains asymmetrical. Countering the dominance of philosophical *vision*, Mehta suggests that there is first and foremost a *hearing* before there is a quest-ioning. "Realization of truth in and through thinking,"

writes Mehta, "comprises a two-fold movement, the movement of 'hearing' and the movement of questioning, with the former as basic and first" (HV 254). Recalling K. C. Bhattacharyya's work, Mehta writes, "Bhattacharryya's thinking, as also his concept of thinking, gave explicit and appropriate place to the notion of a 'demand'… the recognition of it as in some sense sacred, and one's *response* in the act of thinking as itself *religious*, as an act of truth and of truing" (PPR 175). Mehta here weds response directly to religion. The passivity/receptivity of hearing and response oppose the initiative of vision and quest(ion)ing. Mehta finds that the truth of religion and inter-religious understanding lies in a hearing and a response, not in an anticipated projection, a fore-*sight*, a *quest* after universality, a philosophical initiative.[36] As we will see in Chap. 6, it is precisely such initiative that constitutes the nature of transcendental subjectivity, itself the culmination of a certain Western philosophical trajectory (Taylor 1984).

By hearing and responding, the self religiously foregoes the burden of philosophical initiation. The "opacity" that remains "unthought" remains so because it is inaccessible to vision/philosophy/thought. Mehta argues:

> Whether and to what extent it can be actualized depends upon whether we learn to experience the need for a non-metaphysical form of thinking, for a meditative thinking which is *not so much an instrument* we can wield to have reality in our grasp, as a *responsive* gesture on the part of man to a *call* that comes from *beyond* him; and upon whether we learn to think in a manner which acknowledges and is open to the *mystery* of a reality that *hides* itself in its very manifestation. (WC 260; emphasis added)

Like the withdrawal of the holy considered in the previous chapter, the address comes from a present absence, a "reality that hides itself in its very manifestation." That which thus remains hidden from vision is something that escapes the optic trope/philosophy altogether. In this way, *responding* to the other is that ironic, poetic "last act" that "fills up a lack." Despite its intimate ties to transcendental subjectivity, Mehta at one point locates in the tradition of the Vedānta the same sense of hearing preceding questioning. He writes, "The whole history of Vedanta… is ample and massive testimony to the existence of a genuinely inquiring, questioning, spirit within this [Hindu] tradition, both of the kind of questioning which Heidegger called *Frommigkeit des Denkens* and of the ability to '*hear'* which he subsequently recognized as the primordial gesture of thought, prior to questioning" (HCIW 16).

The receptivity of hearing is the religious experience that thwarts the primacy of philosophical understanding and its edifying supplement. "Religiously… understanding others should not be only the satisfaction of curiosity…. Understanding others must culminate in self-understanding, as an acting on oneself but letting the other be" (PU 272-273). Here we indeed sense the nuance in Mehta's reading of *self*-understanding. He certainly sees self-understanding constituting "the basic religious process"

[36] On this point, Derrida ostensibly agrees: "'Religion is **the response**" (1998: 26), writing elsewhere, "There we might have, perhaps, a pre-definition: however little may be known of religion *in the singular*, we do know that it is always a response and responsibility" (1998: 34).

(PU 268). But religious self-understanding, as opposed to the self-maintenance of philosophical self-understanding, involves an encounter with the other that "alter(s) *us* in our very depths" (PPE 88). On this reading, philosophical understanding fortifies the self through reduction/domestication of the other. Religious understanding and postcolonial hermeneutics, by contrast, rend the self through self-subordination to the other. For Mehta, religious understanding, the pilgrim's understanding, overcomes the colonial spirit implicit in philosophical understanding. Instead of the other serving as an overcome moment within a rational progression, the other renders the self's position forever contingent and thereby accidental. The *tīrtha*, the other, death, is before/beyond vision, before/beyond representation. For Mehta, the religious distance opened by the inassimilable other is ultimately one that deconstructs (soils) the static identities of all parties concerned by recognizing an irreducible blind spot, an *interior* opacity, serving as the limit of the dominant position. Precisely to this extent, the encounter with the other must be blind, beyond fore-sight.

Thus there can be neither a comparative philosophy, nor a comparative philosophy of religion according to Mehta. The cross-cultural encounter irrevocably precludes the third position, thus throwing the two parties into a situation where both suffer change in dialogue. There is no "neutral" third position because such neutrality itself "is a European phenomenon" (Halbfass 1988: 428). "Comparative philosophy genuinely emerges…" writes Mehta, "when and only when… understanding… involves… the readiness to let this 'other' speak to us as the other that it is and with an openness to its truth-claim" (HCIW 5). Inaugurated by the question and in search of the universal, philosophy is for Mehta a secondary, and significantly provincial, activity to the primary response to the other. The cross-cultural encounter is in this way a certain religious experience, that is, a chancy adventure, a pilgrimage, as the other, ironically, serves as the *tīrtha*, the sacred crossing from the realm of chimeras/synchrony/immortality/philosophy to that of truth/diachrony/mortality/religion.

## 4.5 The Pilgrim and the 'Europeanization of the Earth'

If we could end the discussion here, then it seems as though we would have a "quasi-prolegomena" to any future cross-cultural hermeneutic based on the model of the pilgrim. I believe Mehta has something like this in mind when he puts forward such a model. To be sure, the pilgrim is a model that contests the philosophical model tied to domestication and domination, to "Western understanding." The philosophical model, the transcendental model, imposes method and requires disengaged observation. The pilgrim, to the contrary, is deeply engaged, religiously engaged to the point of slipping from center. Mehta's pilgrim tropically marks in this way the "quasi-transcendental" as Caputo conceives it:

> Transcendental conditions nail things down, pin them in place, inscribe them firmly within rigorously demarcated horizons; quasi-transcendental conditions allow them to slip loose, twist free from their surrounding horizons, to leak and run off, to exceed or overflow their margins…. [A] quasi-transcendental condition is a condition of or for entities, not an entity

> itself; a condition under which things appear, but too poor and impoverished, too unkingly, to dictate what there is or what there is not, lacking the power to bring what is not into being, lacking the authority to prohibit something from being. (1997: 12–13).

The pilgrim errs, I suggest, due to such "quasi-transcendental conditions." Pilgrimage is indeed an *Irregang*. The pilgrim is dirty and common, not high and kingly. The pilgrim recognizes his "quasi-essence," that is, his utter contingency. For this reason, I propose that Mehta's pilgrim directly contests the "Europeanization of the Earth" and its subject grounded in the will-to-power.

Even so, fully understanding the model of the pilgrim (which would of course include its application) is more easily said than done; perhaps the situation is a bit more complicated. Not only must we acknowledge the difficulty of recognizing our own mortality (itself a grave narcissistic injury), but we must also recognize the cultural capital now held by those cultures openly embracing European styles of thought and investigation. Who doesn't own a little stock in Western philosophy/science? Indeed, in all the discussion thus far, I have repeatedly referred to cross-cultural encounter and dialogue. While I have explicitly referenced the debate concerning the possession of philosophy by cultures other than the European, what has gone unquestioned not only in these remarks, but perhaps in many discussions concerning multi-culturalism, is the very idea of multiple cultures, multiple horizons, multiple Daseins with multiple possibilities. In other words, can we not ask the question, as in fact Mehta demands that we do, whether or not it even makes sense to speak of multiple cultures in today's "world civilization"? Can we really find two interlocutors that represent two disparate cultures? Can there be a dialogue between civilization*s* today? After all, Mehta himself states in 1977: "The traditional contrast between East and West does not obtain any longer and there is little meaning left in the attempt to define our own identity as Westerners or Orientals, in terms of our difference from each other" (WC 258).

Mehta discerns a decisive alteration in the planetary situation with the emergence of the "'Vasco da Gama epoch' in world history." He writes, "The 'modern period' coincided with the rise of the West as the dominant civilization. Since 1850, with the full blossoming of the colonial age, this dominance, in the realm of ideas, perceptions and skills, would seem to have become *irreversible*" (WC 254; emphasis added). Here of course Mehta echoes Bhattacharyya's concerns about the haunted Indian. Provocatively, Mehta contends that Husserl's and Heidegger's "Europeanization of the Earth" is

> *no longer a mere threat but has become a harsh reality*, when his way of thinking is in most respects taken up into and dominated by the universal sway of the metaphysical, the rational, the scientific, and the technological, the thinking Indian faces a challenge to which he was never exposed before: the compulsion of belonging, irretrievably and inescapably, to this '*one* world' of the *Ge-Stell*, to a world 'one' only in the desolation of being enveloped within the Nihilistic metaphysical heritage of the West. (SL 91; emphasis added)

Recognizing, of course, that India has hosted visitors from beyond its borders for centuries, Mehta detects that something significantly different has taken place with the incoming of colonial Europe in the modern period. Unlike the visitation by Alexander and the Greeks, and the rule of the Mughal Empire (to name but the obvious examples),

the European colonial presence significantly altered the Hindu's relationship to his tradition, as well as to himself (the emphasis of postcolonial hermeneutics). Imported styles of thought and reflection became the assumed idiom for self-expression and self-understanding. Mehta's India had/has fallen under the sway of Nietzsche's "spirit of Socratism," that is, a spirit of nihilism emanating not only from Socrates but also Plotinus, Augustine, and Anselm, to name just a few. He writes, "We in India too are trapped in Western history and its fruit, world-civilization, in the nihilism underlying the entire metaphysical tradition of the West and its fruit, science and technology, in this Europeanization of the Earth, whether we know it or not" (PPE 98). Mehta provocatively suggests here that the sway of European metaphysics has taken root in India whether or not Indians, as well as Westerners, are willing to acknowledge it. India belongs to the world civilization. "The end of philosophy proves to be the triumph of the manipulable arrangement of a scientific-technological world and of the social order proper to this world," writes Heidegger, "The end of philosophy means the beginning of world civilization that is based upon Western European thinking" (1977b: 435).

The *Gestell*, the 'en-framing,' bespeaks the era wherein the self seeks to understand philosophically, and conceptually represent, all that surrounds him. To this extent, modern man is neither a poet nor a pilgrim. Mehta writes of an "emasculation of the spirit" as well as "its restless craving for mastery over everything that is," ultimately becoming blind to that which does not submit itself to "calculability" and "manipulative control" (PMH 393). The "world civilization" is driven by its need to overcome its lack. Unlike the pilgrim who embraces his lack, present-day man strives to overcome the mortal challenge to his authority/propriety. World civilization, ultimately based on the Western tradition, *is* philosophical. "Western thought includes scientific, economic, political, social thinking, everything that has become part of world-civilization and which is no longer integrally related to what was once Western civilization, everything that can be employed by the rest of the world as a *neutral instrument*" (WC 257). Curiously, perhaps even the provincial West has been outstripped by its own "neutral trajectory." Halbfass notes in this regard, "In a sense, Europe itself has been 'superseded' and left behind by the modern Westernized world" (1988: 440). Even though these once "culturally 'loaded'" instruments appear as "neutral," and therefore *a*cultural, they nevertheless retain (and this is the pernicious aspect to the whole thing for Mehta) the "substance of an experience of Being that is Greek and Western" (WC 257).

Yet, why bemoan the course of history? Are we merely sensing a *ressentiment* among the dominated cultures of the world? Certainly Paul Ricouer speaks of the "single world civilization" as a "gigantic progress" and "a good in itself."[37] Nevertheless, Mehta finds these remarks concerning "Universal Civilizations and National Cultures" rather problematic. He argues, "This new setting for 'universal modern civilization', it would seem, is conceived from too Eurocentric and rationalistic

[37] See Paul Ricoeur's "Universal Civilization and National Cultures," in his *History and Truth* (1965).

a point of view and perhaps, in view of striking changes in the climate of thought and sensibility during the past decade, he [i.e., Ricouer] would not still speak of that impending event as 'a good in itself' and as 'a gigantic progress'" (WC 254). Indeed, perhaps in much the same way that World War I disturbed the European enthusiasm for scientific progress and industrialization, so too, the violent political struggles throughout the world in the 1960s and 1970s – from the race riots in the American south to the Vietnam war, the rule of Pol Pot, and religious terrorism – should and for some obviously did cast doubt on the beneficence of "universal modern civilization."[38] Such reservations notwithstanding, 'Europeanization,' for all thinkers considered here, seems irreversible. In fact, the very idea of "a" civilization, as if there were one among others, is challenged through the "transformation of Western civilization into world-civilization" (WC 256). The likes of Samuel P. Huntington (1996) notwithstanding, it would appear that "One cannot have," Mehta argues, "a purely Hindu, Islamic or Christian horizon in today's world" (LW 231).

Though treated as a neutral instrument, "Western metaphysical thought," as indicated in Chap. 1, enters other horizons like a "Trojan Horse." According to Mehta, Western civilization "does not exist alongside of other civilizations but has already itself entered into them, though in a form which is a chilling shadow of itself, having emptied itself of its own substance and deadly to everything it touches" (WC 256). This is why "it is important to seek to determine the real character of Western thought, of 'philosophy', more precisely than by a geographical name" (WC 257). Mehta recalls here one of our earlier questions: What does an ethnic (or geographical) coefficient signify when appended to "philosophy"? He contends that the tag 'Western' affects much more than mere accidental locality. Philosophy does not *just happen* to be Western, that is, a universal achievement divorceable from its accidental origin. For Mehta, something specific has taken place within the West that did not originally occur in the so-called East. Accordingly, Mehta sees only one path open to the contemporary Easterner: "There is no other way open to us in the East but to go along with this Europeanization and to go *through* it. Only through this voyage into the foreign and strange can we win back our own self-hood" (SL 91-92). Mehta has found his *tīrtha*.

The pilgrimage of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries thus involves an encounter not only with the West's metaphysical heritage, but also with Heidegger and his hermeneutics. Recall that for Mehta (while responding to questions at the Simla conference), the path that leads through Heidegger is the only one available to the contemporary pilgrim: "To my mind there is no choice" (LW 225). For Mehta, the Indian horizon in the modern period is incontestably implicated in the Western metaphysical horizon and, to this extent, Heidegger not only points out the openings for the West, but can do so as well for South Asia.

> The major part of this paper [i.e., "Heidegger and the Comparison of Indian and Western Philosophy"] will seek to bring out the relevance of Heidegger's thought to the enterprise of comparative philosophy, particularly in respect to what may broadly be called methodology,

[38] See footnote 4 above for Mehta's reflections on the ills of modernity.

> and this will also serve to elucidate and illustrate the thesis that the central task of comparative philosophy is best formulated in terms of understanding and interpretation, at least from the point of view of the Indian who stands, however precariously, within his own philosophical tradition and who also participates out of historical necessity, however inadequately, in the Western tradition. (HCIW 5)

Cross-cultural hermeneutics goes through Heidegger's "overcoming of metaphysics." Yet, as G. Larson argues and Mehta would in all likelihood agree, many still labor under the auspices of a Hegelian history. Perhaps an example of this persistent metaphysical horizon, as well as its challenge, would be helpful.

Anticipating a full discussion of Hindu texts in the following chapter, here I will touch on a resounding theme in Vedic exegesis: *ṛta*. Agreeing with Henrich Lüders, Mehta writes, "as against the commonly accepted translation, that is, interpretation of this word [i.e., *ṛta*] as 'cosmic order,' Lüders has conclusively shown that in every single case 'where the word *ṛta* occurs in this text it can, and should be, rendered as 'truth'" (RV 285). Of course the issue regarding "truth," or *ṛta*, in the Veda is no small matter; after all, it begs the enigmatic question, What is truth? Lüders writes, "'*ṛta* exclusively signifies the truth of the spoken word or thought… that what is asserted corresponds with reality'" (quoted in RV 289). Though Lüders adjusts the meaning of *ṛta* from 'cosmic order' to 'truth,' he nevertheless conflates, according to Mehta, a philological accuracy with a philosophical inaccuracy. Lüders, perhaps unwittingly, imports into the Vedic text an understanding of truth dictated by a Western ontotheological perspective. Lüders is not alone here. Eli Franco has recently argued, "the basic assumption of all Indian philosophers is always a correspondence theory of truth" (1987: 26). Are Lüders and Franco correct in their assertions? Mehta contends, "what is taken for granted by him [i.e., Lüders, and by extension Franco] and unquestioningly presupposed are the notions of truth and falsity as residing solely in statements and of the correspondence theory of truth, presuppositions which are constitutive of the Western metaphysical tradition, in terms of which he then interprets the Vedic religio-poetic tradition" (RV 289-290). It is of course this presupposed correspondence theory of truth that has suffered a destructive critique at the hands of Heidegger. For Heidegger, as for Mehta, something must precede the possibility of having statements and assertions match up with 'what is out there,' and it is precisely this (overlooked/forgotten) primordial happening that is truth. "In his deconstructive critique of that Western tradition," Mehta comments, "Heidegger… found that the 'metaphysical' idea of truth as correctness of judgment presupposes something or some happening which is the condition of the possibility of the former" (RV 290). Mehta sees Heidegger's comments regarding the "*Lichtung*" as instructive for his reading of *ṛta*. *Lichtung*, meaning 'lighting' or 'clearing,' points to that opening necessary for the play of opposites to unfold (and here we of course recall our discussion of the opening in the previous chapter). For Mehta, this is the truth that *ṛta* signifies.

The Western Vedists, from whom Mehta self-admittedly learns much, certainly command the skills appropriate to philology, but they often lack hermeneutical skills indispensable to an adequate project in understanding the other's traditions. "The task of philosophical understanding is thus different from and wider than that of pure philological scholarship, detached, leaving the scholar uninvolved and

secure in his own world of meaning" (HCIW 5). (Of course, Mehta comes to question even "philosophical understanding" in his later pieces – HCIW being written in 1970.) The essential problem, and one that was dealt with at length in the previous chapter, is prejudice. "In the interpretation of the Vedic text, it is not only religious and cultural-anthropological prejudices that have been at play during two centuries of Western Vedic scholarship; philosophical presuppositions too have wrought havoc here, through the unquestioning importation of Western conceptuality into another tradition" (RV 281). Indeed, "Philological knowledge… is a necessary but not sufficient condition of interpretation, in the sense of a hermeneutic endeavor to which the present philosophical understanding of the interpreter and his situatedness in his present as well as in his tradition are vitally relevant" (RV 289). Here Mehta anticipates Spanos's argument: "Knowledge production – more specifically, the Occidental interpretation of being – informs, and is informed by, an imperial will to power. Any failure to recognize this 'ontological imperialism' renders postcolonial discourse and practice inadequate to its emancipatory task."[39]

The philologist, according to Mehta, often assumes the transparency and universality of the current philosophical position: the philologist overlooks his own facticity. "The interpreter's activity is determined in large measure by the contemporaneous state of thinking in linguistics and poetics, and in the study of religion, including that of myth, symbol and ritual, current in his time. *Above all*, his interpretation depends on the most general philosophical concepts available to him historically and currently" (RV 289). To these ends, Mehta feels that, for example, Paul Thieme's deployment of language such as "world-picture of the Vedic Aryans," fails the hermeneutic test. Is there any reason to assume the priority of a disengaged subject representing a transcendent world, a transcendence necessitating the adequation of language to reality? The unproblematized use of terms like *Weltanschauung* and "world-picture" overlooks precisely the philosophical presuppositions contained therein. "Philological knowledge and philosophical criticism cannot be kept apart…. Both Vedists [i.e., Thieme and Lüders], among the most distinguished of them all," argues Mehta, "speak in terms of *Weltbild* and *Weltanschauung*, as though the Vedic *ṛṣis* were talking about nature in the modern sense, as an object confronting the human subject" (RV 281). Of course it is here that we see Mehta's reliance upon the developments in the hermeneutics of facticity examined in Chap. 3. Vedic *ṛṣis*, according to Mehta, did not objectify the external world. "Keeping aside all notions of the so called 'world-picture of Vedic Aryans' or of a 'Vedic cosmology,' we must understand 'world' itself as an *existentiale*, as an aspect of man's mode of being, of his being-in-the-world" (RV 278). Thus the question is not what world did the Vedic seers encounter and then report on, but rather, what world did they actively construct, nurture, and participate in.[40] "Despite my great admiration for Paul Thieme's philological acumen," Mehta confesses, "I cannot help experiencing… reservations

[39] See Chap. 1.

[40] Gianni Vattimo notes in this regard, "Thrownness in a historical opening is always inseparable from an active participation in its constitution, its creative interpretation and transformation" (1997: 83).

about the language of some of his interpretations" (RV 290). Mehta's reservations ultimately concern this accepted and taken-for-granted horizon that ultimately displaces the Indian from an intimate relationship to his own traditions: Mehta is so alienated.

Perhaps antagonizing his peers by accepting this "Europeanization of the Earth," Mehta argues that the Indian religious tradition has fallen into a dilapidated state. In fact, he pejoratively contends that the colonial and postcolonial period in India is "the most thoughtless and mendacious moment of our entire history" (PPE 98), writing elsewhere:

> In the past 125 years Ram Mohun Roy, Vivekananda, Krishnacandra Bhattacarya, and Radhakrishnan certainly made an attempt to revive and renew Vedanta, particularly Advaita Vedanta. It would perhaps not be an exaggeration, however, to say that so far, even in our present post-colonial situation, the necessary research and investigation has not been done in order to lay a strong foundation, nor has the intellectual framework been set up that is vibrant and alive enough to be able to support the present and future of Indian culture. (PP 251)

Citing the "replacement of the massive Dharmashastra tradition," the "relegating to antiquarian scholarship our pioneering and sophisticated tradition of inquiry in the fields of linguistics and poetics, which sustained our civilized living for millenia," and "our growing alienation from the extensive epic and puranic tradition of narrative," Mehta feels that the horizon within which these various traditional moorings found room has now collapsed (PPE 98-99). Consequent upon the contingent predominance of the Western, and at one time provincial, metaphysical tradition, Mehta writes in 1976 that the "cumulative religious tradition in India" is comparable to "a temple in ruins" (BBK 216). A "temple in ruins"? Why "temple"? Why "ruins"? Is it simply that the Hindu tradition is replete with temples and temple practices, and as such the temple serves as a suitable metonym for the tradition at large? Of course this could be one reading of "temple." There is, however, a more sophisticated use of "temple" here, one that certainly reflects Mehta's deeper, postcolonial concerns.

India's temple is in ruins, I propose, because the original opening, the original tear (*Riss*) of the Hindu tradition has collapsed under the weight of the Western metaphysical tradition. The opening that provides the possibility of a vital Hindu horizon, the Hindu temple/*templum/temnos*, is in ruins. (Of course, the image of a temple in ruins also resonates directly with the decimation central to what I call Mehta's postcolonial hermeneutics.) Precisely to this extent, Mehta wants to renew the relationship of the original tear that allowed the Hindu tradition to emerge from out of concealment. This he does not simply to return to the traditionalist's past, but rather to interpret it anew and according to questions arising under the influence of contemporary developments East and West in philosophy and religious thought. Accordingly, Mehta recognizes that there can be no *simple* returning to a narrow parochialism: "The Indian scholar seeking to reinterpret and reformulate the *Vedanta*, for example, in free, critical fashion, *has* to make use of terms and concepts deriving from Western philosophy, because he is also unavoidably a participant in the horizon of intelligibility stemming from the West, creative and vital, expanding and ceaselessly changing in its kaleidoscopic variety" (HCIW 17).

Subsequent to his retirement from Harvard University, Mehta saw his task in the 1980s precisely as the rebuilding of this Hindu temple with the aid of bricks taken from various cultural traditions. "The Indian philosopher concerned with systematic and speculative thought," Mehta explicitly writes as early as 1970, "…his concern is with *building* and he takes his bricks from whence he can… he will seek to *build in words a temple* for this vision, tracing his way back through the errant history of later, 'systematic' developments, perhaps even bypassing it altogether" (HCIW 18; emphasis added). For Mehta, the vision of Hinduism today, a vision *in media res* to be sure, must draw its resources from the errant, and thus contingent, confrontation of disparate traditions and methodologies, an implicit call to become pilgrims on the bridge that crosses the confluence of the world's cultures. "Europeanization" is then a *tīrtha*, a liminal space of crossing due to which Mehta's own idols/concepts must fall. Contesting the reactionary identity politics often tied to the Orientalism debate so associated with the postcolonial period, Mehta writes, "How fascinating to watch India reflected in the Western humanistic mirror, as in the mirror held up by the Christian missionary or theologian… by the Jewish, Muslim, Far Eastern, and Marxist scholars… My understanding of myself as an Indian Hindu is inseparable, I have found, from such reflective mediation" (PP 238).

The Western other thus enables Mehta to understand himself differently (and perhaps at times more thoroughly). "Going through" the West then "demands a profounder rethinking of our Indian tradition in terms of its own original beginnings, of what was originally '*heard'* in it… a clearer vision of the nature, significance, and limitations of metaphysical thinking (that is, representational, conceptual, logical, scientific thinking in the Western sense, as also of allied manifestation within our own tradition)" (SL 92). Moreover, "the free encounter with other traditions made both possible and necessary in today's planetary civilization," attests Mehta, "provides an unparalleled opportunity to reawaken… the sense of vast alternatives, magnificent or hateful, lurking in the background, and awaiting to overwhelm our safe little traditions, which was lost by the moderns" (PIU 128). Notice that in keeping with his philosophy of the genuine future, Mehta here recognizes that the future construction may hold in store something "hateful." In this way, Mehta, the pilgrim, embraces chance and uncertainty. And, once again, rather than lopsidedly condemning the prevalence of Western metaphysics, Mehta finds Europe's traditions provocative and thereby liberating.[41]

As discussed in Chap. 2, I submit that Mehta's own career can be seen as an exemplification of his thought. His own pilgrimage starts with a full examination of the Western tradition, that is, he goes through the West. By such a pilgrimage, he eventually comes to a renewed understanding of his own Hindu tradition(s). To this extent, it is possible to see Mehta's *tīrthas* not only in the works of Martin Heidegger,

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[41] Along these same lines, Halbfass asks, "Did it [i.e., Europeanization] help others [e.g., Indians] gain freedom and distance from their traditional foundations and limitations (could we add 'tyranny of hidden prejudice')? … Is the alienation, the loss of authentic 'traditional' self-understanding which Europe has inflicted upon non-European cultures, perhaps something enviable?" (1988: 440).

Hans-Georg Gadamer, et al., but also in the *Ṛgveda, Mahābhārata* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* texts from his own classical tradition. Mehta indeed returns to his own roots, his own soil, as a pilgrim having crossed over the bridge that is Heideggerian and Gadamerian hermeneutics with hard-won lessons concerning the decentering nature of the religious encounter with the other. While at Harvard University in the 1970s, Mehta's pilgrimage makes a turn homeward, a turn the intention of which is to "lay a strong foundation," to set up an "intellectual framework… that is vibrant and alive enough to be able to support the present and future of Indian culture." In the 1980s, Mehta undertakes just such a task: Mehta builds anew Hinduism's temple. It is to the details of this construction that we now turn.

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# Chapter 5
# Digging at the Roots: The Logic of the Hindu Tradition

## 5.1 Introduction

Having examined his structure of the pilgrim, as well as his sense that "Europeanization" has razed "India's cumulative religious tradition," I turn now to Mehta's late writings on the Hindu tradition. Here Mehta in effect accomplishes the pilgrim's pilgrimage. Returning from his adventure out to the deeply challenging Western *tīrtha*, Mehta now seeks to detect the latent spirit, the logic, of his own cultural tradition.[1] To this extent, he rebuilds the Hindu temple/*templum*/*temnos*. In what follows, I systematically trace for the first time the dynamics of Mehta's Hindu logic. Paying particular attention to the procession of tropes through his pieces on the so-called Vedic/Upaniṣadic, Epic, and Purāṇic "stages" of Hinduism, I detail what is in effect Mehta's postmetaphysical interpretation of his own roots and soil.

Mehta observes a *sui generis* logic in the development of the Hindu tradition.[2] This logic, or rather, and as he prefers, this *svadhā* (to use a Vedic rather than Aristotelian expression), does not point to a comprehensive and simple *sat* ("being")

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[1] I discuss at length in Chap. 4, section four Mehta's use of the *tīrtha* as a South Asian category for the other that always retains an opaque quality, that is to say, the other as irreducible to the self's intentional horizon.

[2] Mehta himself more often than not will speak of the *Indian* tradition rather than the *Hindu* tradition, though he often speaks of himself as a Hindu. Jackson apparently followed Mehta's own words when he edited the book, *J. L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*. This notwithstanding, I feel that for the present discussion "Hindu tradition" will be most appropriate. In fact, when Mehta speaks of the Indian tradition, he more often than not has a particular Hindu tradition in mind. This tradition, as will be seen in what follows, relies upon what could be considered the "Big Tradition." That is, Mehta turns to the classical texts and not to what may be considered more marginal works, e.g., the Tantras. Mehta is not however an essentialist. In speaking of the world's religious traditions, Mehta writes, "None of these traditions is a monolith; each has conflicting elements within its structure, giving to it its own unique dynamism; each has gone through, and responded to, the crises and contingencies of the factitious turns and events of history" (PU 273).

T.B. Ellis, *On the Death of the Pilgrim: The Postcolonial Hermeneutics of Jarava Lal Mehta*, Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures 3,
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as ground, nor does it point to a logic of mere imperfect emanations (e.g., *vyūhas*) that long for a recuperation of an original plenitude.[3] Rather, and as I will show, Mehta's Hindu *svadhā* is a sacrificial logic, or perhaps, a sacrifice of logic. Indeed, Mehta's readings in Heideggerian and post-Heideggerian philosophy encourage him to pursue a philosophy of Hinduism wherein the emphasis falls on absence rather than presence, on incompletion rather than completion, on separation rather than totality. Significantly, Mehta addresses in this way what Wilhelm Halbfass has called "the forgotten presupposition in later developments of Indian thought," that is, "the idea of a primeval opening, separation."[4]

Mehta's work on the Hindu tradition adumbrates a subject who ultimately must sacrifice itself, that is, its transcendental intentions and initiatives, and by so doing paradoxically becomes whole not by reuniting with a higher totality, but rather in accepting its incompletion and separation through a relationship to the other *as* other. While the Hindu tradition certainly points repeatedly to the desire to overcome the empirical ego (*ahaṁkāra*), often this has been done in the service of a more encompassing sense of self, that is, the *ātman*. Mehta, to the contrary, introduces a narcissistic injury of the truly first order.[5] That is to say, Mehta's denial

As for Mehta's sense of a Hindu logic consider the following: "One can see that an inner logic governs the three millennia of religious change in India, giving it a unity that is intrinsically historical, at least" (HT 106-107); "It is a way of looking at things, an attitude of mind and a habit of thinking, leaving nothing unsubjected to its scrutiny, generating again and again trends and movements exemplified by the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, criticizing, debunking and replacing concepts no longer capable of ordering our experience in the manner demanded by its own inner logic and commitments" (PIU 124-125).

[3] Mehta writes, "Was there, is there, perhaps a potency, a virtue, an entelechy, or to use a Vedic rather than an Aristotelian term, the majesty of a *svadhā* inherent in the text itself that enabled it to hold its own, create its own destiny through the perils of historical existence and inspire in turn the faith which led the Brahmins of India to cherish and guard it by dint of unflagging labour and energy?" (HT 105). *Svadhā* means "self-power," "inherent power" according to the Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary.

[4] "The idea of a primeval opening, separation, holding apart is of extraordinary importance in Vedic cosmogony, and it remains a significant, though often forgotten presupposition in later developments of Indian thought" (Halbfass 1988: 317). Thus, while Mehta was certainly influenced by the Continental philosophers, his reading of the Hindu tradition does not simply repeat the colonial strategy of reducing the Indian to non-Indian categories.

[5] Phillip Spratt (1966) has made the argument that Hinduism's repeated emphases on the withdrawal from the external world (e.g., doctrines of *māyā* and *prakṛti* that we find in the Advaita Vedānta and Sāṅkhya respectively) indicate a libidinal cathexis of the self. That is to say, Hindus, so Spratt argues, withdraw from the world in service of a narcissism. Sudhir Kakar (1981) introduced the notion of a narcissistic injury of the first order to the extent that the Indian child must break out of a theorized union between, primarily, himself and his mother. Kakar suggests that the monism characteristic of some forms of Hindu mysticism may be attempts to re-actualize infantile symbiosis. Mehta, here, addresses not a psychological construct, but rather a transcendental, or quasi-transcendental structure of subjectivity.

of self resonates on both the empirical level and, significantly, the transcendental/structural level as well. Here, of course, we can discern Mehta's structure of the pilgrim: Mehta (perhaps unknowingly) deploys his hermeneutic of the pilgrim to interpret the Hindu tradition. He develops this logic through three stages, all involving an interpretation of the relationship obtaining between the intentional, initiating self and the transcendent other: "We may pick out three focal points in the history of this hermeneutical enterprise…. The first is the *Ṛgveda Saṁhitā…* including the Upaniṣads… the second is the epic tradition, especially the *Mahābhārata…*the third focal point… is the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*" (LW 219).

Challenging popular interpretations of Hinduism as, for example, a religion of many gods, as well as a religion of one absolute and undifferentiated *sat* ('being,' 'essence') à la the concept of *nirguṇa Brahman* (i.e., *Brahman* without distinguishing qualities), Mehta's interpretation curiously traces the "disappearance" of these gods, as well as the structural preclusion of this undifferentiated and monistic *sat*. The plenitude of being is sacrificed. Admittedly, this logic is not immediately present upon inspection of any one particular essay; all the same, we can look to Mehta's choice of tropes, as well as his characterizations of these tropes, throughout his work to disclose the unifying thread. In this regard, I should point out that while Mehta provides plenty of comments concerning the classical Hindu texts, I do not attempt an exhaustive catalogue of these references here. Rather, my concerns are solely with articulating from Mehta's occasional statements and suggestions just what this Hindu logic must be. To this extent, and as stated in the introduction, I treat Mehta's work as an internally coherent whole, and so I will allow his analysis of Heidegger's ontological difference to influence, for example, the way he reads *viraha bhakti*, or "love-in-separation." In this regard, we must be ready to acknowledge that the Hindu logic Mehta adumbrates may in the end challenge accepted interpretations of the classical Hindu tradition.

Mehta's Hindu logic traces the withdrawal of the gods. His writings suggest that the gods, who are front and center in the Veda, eventually come to share with humans a mutuality in the *Mahābhārata*. This "decentered" role is eventually supplanted in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* with a *structural absence*. That is to say, in Mehta's third stage of the Hindu tradition, the god, that is, the other structurally withdraws, a withdrawal precluding the plenitude of being. The formal relation to the other in the *Purāṇa* is thus a relation to a present absence. Through such structural separation, the space necessary for the most intense mode of love for the other manifests itself, that is, *viraha bhakti*, or "love-in-separation." Love for the forever absent other, I argue, brings Mehta's Hindu logic to its conclusion. Subtly indicating the progression of this logic through his chosen texts, Mehta writes, "In this paper an attempt is made to suggest how a literary approach to the epic [i.e., the *Mahābhārata*] can bring into it the subtlety with which the *transition* from the explicit affirmation of the *old order to* the hinted shape of *the new* in which *bhakti* is the ultimate integrating principle, is depicted" (KD 215; emphases added). I thus propose that for Mehta the Veda/Upaniṣads is an "old order" giving way through the *Mahābhārata* to

"the new" order integrated by Purāṇic *bhakti*.[6] How we are to interpret this transition, this logic, is the task at hand.

From Indra in the Veda to Arjuna/Duryodhana of the epic, and further to the *gopīs* of the Purāṇa, Mehta's logic traces a tropic progression from what I call the "thwarted self," to the "nihilistically narcissistic self," to the "devoted self."[7] The transition from the old order to the new does not entail, to be sure, a radical discontinuity in the tradition. Rather, Mehta figures the *Mahābhārata* as a transition between the old and new orders to the extent that the transitional literature redresses the satisfaction of the thwarted self in the old order in lieu of the emergence of the devoted self in the new. In fact, I propose that his new order repeats the old: as the *gopī* repeats Indra, so too the devoted self repeats the thwarted self. For both the thwarted self and the devoted self, for both Indra and the *gopī*, Mehta suggests that there is the presence of an absence, a lack. That is to say, in both the "old order" of the Veda and the "new" order of *bhakti*, the self (Indra, *gopī*) perceives itself to stand in relation to that which exceeds its constitutive capacity. Alterity eludes the self's authority. Thus Indra and the *gopī* are, like the pilgrim, incomplete. Following Mehta's suggestions, I propose that for the *thwarted* self, and unlike the pilgrim, this lack is a condition that must be overcome by regaining the plenitude of being. For the *devoted* self, on the other hand, the condition of lack is lovingly accepted. The latter accepts devotionally the former's source of despondency.

In the Vedic/Upaniṣadic stage (i.e., the "old order," Mehta's first stage), there is a fear of the transcendent other that denies recognition and thus relationship. The other's, i.e., Vṛtra's, radical alterity threatens the would-be sovereign self, i.e., Indra. Obdurate alterity affects a narcissistic injury to the self who would be sovereign. This condition facilitates the heroics of the god whose thwarted self must aggressively overcome the other, establishing himself as king, as master. In the second stage, the epic stage, we find the unexpected outcome that is the thwarted self's "satisfaction": sovereignty becomes nihilistic narcissism. In the epic, and through the character of

[6] Though Mehta speaks of three hermeneutical focal points, I do not believe he is simply employing the triadic structure of the Hegelian dialectic. For Mehta, there is an old order and a new order. The second focal point figures a transition from the old to the new and does not present a fully autonomous movement within the whole. All of this will become clear in what follows. It has also been brought to my attention that if Mehta does endorse a movement through three stages, this would seem to be contrary to the Hindu quadratic thought, e.g., the three *dvija varnas* as opposed to the *śūdra*. On this notion, Rosane Rocher writes, "Besides traditional divisions in sets of eighteen, Indian culture shows a fondness for classifications in 3 + 1 schemes: three Vedas that are recited in the sacrifice, and a fourth that is not; three castes that are twice born, and a fourth that is not; three purposes to this life, and a fourth out of this life; three stages in this life, and a fourth out of this life; three stages of sleep, and yet another, named 'the fourth'; and so forth" (1993: 243–244). While this is certainly not in doubt, I believe we can also point to the Sāṅkhya *darśana* as evincing a triadic classification: *sattva, rajas, and tamas*. Arguably, this *darśana* is historically the oldest. So, in addition to classifications of 18 and 4, we also see a classificatory schema based on 3.

[7] Mehta does not provide any conceptual vocabulary that explicitly reflects his divisions. I have thus taken the liberty to introduce these types in order to elucidate Mehta's Hindu logic.

Duryodhana, we see a championing of the victorious self and presence, entailing a denial of the transcendent other. I propose that this is the nihilistically narcissistic self. Narcissism is nihilistic to the extent that the championing of self through denial of the other leads to the self's own destruction. For Mehta, the "discourse of violence" in the *Mahābhārata*, I will show, pertains precisely to the destruction of this *causa sui* self. But that is not all. The epic stage, as transitional stage, also presents the theme of the other who reaches out to the self. Here, and in contrast to the Vedic old order, initiation rests not with the self's aggressive intentions, but rather with the other's address. Through a friendly economy initiated by the transcendent other, or in this instance Kṛṣṇa, the enmired self, that is, Arjuna eventually foregoes the illusion of the narcissistic subject and is thus decentered. Though the self is re-opened to transcendence, the mutual economy of friendship in the *Mahābhārata* falls short of the *sacrificial svadhā* of Mehta's Hinduism.

In the final stage, the *purāṇic* stage (i.e., the "new" order), the self repeats its initial stage. The self once again finds itself thwarted by an opaque other. However, and unlike the thwarted self's aggressive politics in the first stage, the devoted self (and here I propose we also read, the *bhakta*) foregoes the masculine heroics of the Vedic god. The structure of *bhakti*, or 'devotion,' involves a significant shift from both the old order's aggressive assertion of self, and the transitional period's friendly and masculine economy between self and other, to a loving aneconomy of the new order that fully discloses the structure of sacrifice through the feminine trope of the *gopī*, the "milk maid." This quasi-transcendental structure of sacrifice that the *gopī* marks is, I propose, the structure of the devoted self. The *gopī* lovingly embraces, devotes herself to the other that forever eludes reduction to the self's present. Significantly, and precisely for the sake of a loving relationship, Kṛṣṇa withdraws from the *gopī*. Accordingly, Mehta's texts subtly indicate a shift in both economy and gender accompanying the shift from the thwarted self of the old order's Vedic god to the devoted self of the new order's "milk maid."

## 5.2 The Old Order: *Ṛgveda*, Upaniṣads, and the Thwarted Self

The Hindu tradition, according to Mehta, finds it singular beginning in the *Ṛgveda*: "In the Indian case, the historical origin and source goes back to the *Ṛgveda*, which remains not only the arche-text of this religious tradition but the arché, the animating source of the religiousness that has generated and sustained the tradition and given it its own *unique form and substance*" (HT 102; emphasis added).[8]

[8] In Chap. 4, I analyze Mehta's tropes of "roots" and "soil" that play a significant role in his critique of cross-cultural encounter. Suffice to say for now that Mehta uses "roots" and "soil" to suggest that all transcendence is ultimately soiled by a parochial point of departure that precludes ever reaching a universal standpoint or 'sky-hook,' to borrow from Richard Rorty.

The *Ṛgveda*, as the source and origin, exhibits a "*unique* form and substance," contesting immediately the perennial philosophical pretension to cosmopolitan identity. For Mehta, the *Ṛgveda* does not point back to some other source; it is "unique and *sui generis*" (RV 277). Among the many great beginnings, the many great openings, the *Ṛgveda* is India's arche-temple/*templum/temnos*. "As the Ur-dichtung of the Indian tradition, the Veda is not so much a body of 'meanings' as the source of whatever meaning this tradition has enabled Indians to see in life, as *the very* ***opening*** *of a horizon of meaning*, out of which then *a whole variety of sacred meanings* was constructed in subsequent ages" (HT 105; emphasis and boldface added). Of significance here is Mehta's sense that the Veda is an *original opening of a horizon* of a *variety of sacred meanings*. Not only does the Veda serve as the arche-temple ("original opening"), but it is also the soil in which the complex Hindu tradition apparently roots itself. Mehta suggests in this way that the literature that follows the Veda does so as a footnote: "Most of the religious literature subsequent to it is in the nature of a 'series of footnotes' to it, if not a massive commentary on it – not only the Brāhmaṇa and Upaniṣadic literature but also the Epic and Purāṇic, and the philosophical streams flowing from there" (HT 114). Like the dialogues and texts of Plato and Aristotle for the West, the *Ṛgveda*, according to Mehta, has sent the Indian tradition off into its particular directions, trajectories standing in the shadows of this Ur-text. "One can see that an inner *logic* governs the three millenia of religious change in India," writes Mehta, "This inner logic, this thread running unbroken from Vedic times to the present, is constituted by the single-minded, unshaken will to the preservation of the Holy in human living at all costs" (HT 106-107).[9] Of course, what Mehta means by the "preservation of the Holy in human living" will unfold in what follows.

Acknowledging the *Ṛgveda* to be a source for a "*variety* of sacred meanings," Mehta nevertheless argues that what began as a "disciplined polysemy" eventually narrowed to one principal tradition. He proposes that out of a "tremendous creative beginning" emerged "sacerdotalism and ritualistic extravagance" (HT 103). "Its [i.e., the *Ṛgveda's*] exegesis was from the beginning geared to the perspective of the *use* of the Vedic *mantras* for ritual purposes, *without much concern for the understanding of the text by itself*, as autonomous and constituting a coherent world of meanings. Although it seems to have been recognized that it can be interpreted from alternative points of view and at many levels, *the ritualist school prevailed*" (RV 289; emphases added). The sacerdotal and liturgical tradition (the tradition, recall, for which Mehta did not care greatly) *contingently* foreclosed other possibilities in

[9] Elsewhere Mehta writes, "The pursuit of science… is a way of looking at things, an attitude of mind and a habit of thinking, leaving nothing unsubjected to its scrutiny, generating again and again trends and movements exemplified by the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, criticizing, debunking and replacing concepts no longer capable of ordering our experience in the manner demanded by *its own inner logic and commitments*" (PIU 124-125; emphasis added). These sentiments of course echo Mehta's "postcolonial hermeneutics."

its rise to predominance. The liturgical tradition is thus "one *contingent* track – the only one perhaps possible at the time – out of several possible tracks" (HT 109; emphasis added). Mehta thus argues that certain "phenomenological-hermeneutic" questions concerning the *meaning* of the text outside the liturgical sphere failed to command attention.[10] Consequently, a gold mine of meaning possibly awaits the right prospector. Mehta contemplatively asks, "Is it not always the case that an origin, in the very act of starting off a historical process, hides its essence and keeps it to itself, unexpended in the course taken by the emergent stream?" (HT 103) For Mehta, the contingent emphasis on ritual sacrifice buried the "non-liturgical" meanings. Such burial has in effect produced a distance and alienation facilitative of a renewed relationship with the text.

> Though we are separated from the *Rigveda* by a vast abyss of time, during which our cultural spiritual world has altered several times over, and though we are now estranged from the language of the *Veda* by the emergence and long dominance of classical Sanskrit, we can take comfort and encouragement from the fact that such alienation is also an enabling condition for a re-appropriation of what was once said in the remote past, that the passage of time leads not just to a forgetting but can also mean a conservation, a keeping in reserve, in which time functions as a filter through which messages may reach us in *novel*, perhaps in a more purified sense. (RV 272)

Alienation nurtures novelty and thus liberation. No longer bound to ritual injunction, or to natural cosmological explication, the Veda invites Mehta to engage in a postmetaphysical investigation. To be sure, "The liberation from metaphysical conceptuality… *the new, post-metaphysical way of thinking about man and his world*… all these made me turn towards the *Ṛgveda* as a text constitutive of the very horizon of the traditional Indian way of experiencing life, and worth exploring for its own sake as an *arche*-text" (RV 272; emphasis added).

Never a static inheritance, but always the recipient of novel concerns and questions, the *Ṛgveda* may say new things to questions with new orientations according to Mehta. The Veda may come to say something today that was indeed forgotten, or overlooked, by the liturgical tradition. Obliquely indicating this plethora of interpretive possibilities open to the newcomer, Mehta describes the Veda as "a thousand iridescent lightrays… such… is the *root* and such the *soil* from which it [i.e., the Veda] gathers up the sap that sustains Hindu religiousness" (HT 116; emphasis added). Here, of course, Mehta revisits his tropes of "roots" and "soil," but also notice that we have now been visited by two significantly divergent metaphors. Mehta speaks of the "roots" and "soil" that is the Veda for the Hindu tradition. These are organic, botanical metaphors. Significantly, Mehta also speaks about "building," "bricks," and "temple." These metaphors reflect technical production

[10] Mehta specifically contrasts, "the phenomenological-hermeneutical approach to texts, which is concerned with *what* is meant in the text, is not always compatible with the poetics approach, which is concerned with the *how* or the manner in which that meaning is produced" (RV 292). In general, Mehta is interested in what is meant by the Hindu tradition rather than its specific mode of utterance.

and manipulation. I propose that the disparity in the metaphors figuratively discloses Mehta's understanding that his, as well as his fellow Indians', relationship to the Hindu tradition is no longer a merely organic living out of, but has now become an intentional encounter with an alienation at its core. Spontaneous/organic tradition gives way to deliberate tradition.

Though claiming that the Veda is the "Ur-dichtung," and as such the "great beginning" of the Hindu tradition, Mehta by no means suggests that the Vedic *ṛṣis* composed, *faute de mieux, ex nihilo*. Rather, the Vedic *ṛṣis* composed *in media res*, that is, they ultimately *interpreted* an existing set of cultural symbols in order to evoke novel meanings. The Vedic myths, Mehta thus argues, are "not invented by the poets but taken over and used as a vehicle for new thoughts in terms of which they are thus already interpreted in the text" (RV 283). On this point, Mehta takes issue with Wendy Doniger. He does not think we have to "reconstruct" a latent mythology from the "the Ṛgvedic jumble of paradox heaped on paradox, tropes heaped on tropes.'" Instead, Mehta suggests that we examine what the *ṛṣis* did with what they had: "The important thing, it seems to me is not so much to reconstruct the mythology as to try to see what the Rigvedic seer makes of what he has inherited, to what use he puts it" (RV 283). In this way, Mehta suggests that the *ṛṣis* are ultimately providing an answer to a certain question or concern: "To which 'experience' was Vedism a response and to what counter-claim was it a reply?" (HT 107) Significantly for Mehta, the Vedic *ṛṣis* are *respondents* to the *fear of closure*.

> If there is any experience to which they did their mighty best to *respond*, and to which they gave an enduring *reply*, it was to godlessness… denial of Divinity… the *oppressive closure of sacred space*, the unyielding resistance of all that covers up the hidden truth of things; to the *obduracy of the stone that blocks the well-spring of sacrality* and the *impediment presented by fortifications against friendly solicitations* from the realm of the divine and the true. (HT 107; emphasis added)

Mehta's prose is most telling. Here we find the first indication of his interpretation of the Hindu logic. The concern to be sure is with closure, but we must not fail to see the introduction of two inversely proportional themes. First there is a concern with the "obduracy of the stone." Second there is a concern with "the impediment presented by fortifications against friendly solicitations from the realm of the divine and the true." These two concerns, in effect, trace Mehta's Hindu *svadhā*. I propose that at stake in the first concern, i.e., the obduracy of the stone, is a transcendent other that refuses relationship with the self. The other's stony obduracy thwarts its other. The issue in the second concern, and one certainly dealt with at length in Mehta's discussion of the *Mahābhārata*, is with a self who narcissistically refuses the advances of the other. That is to say, the self resists the other in the name of immanent, autarkic authority, the denial of Divinity, which is godlessness, that is, other-lessness.[11] The obduracy of the stone thwarts the *self's* initiative, while the fortifications against friendly solicitations rejects the *other's* initiative. Both issues

[11] This denial of the other is the condition of Hindu narcissism according to Spratt (1966).

concern the opening between self and other and the closure incumbent upon the lapse in either "pole" of the relationship. The two concerns are thus inversely proportional, and while the germ for the second concern, i.e., the self denying the other, is present in the Veda, I propose that we do not see its full disclosure for Mehta until his discussion of the epic. To be sure, in his pieces on the Veda, Mehta does address the need for man to respond to the friendly solicitations of the gods; that being said, I propose all the same that when Mehta's essays on the Hindu tradition are read *in toto*, we in fact see that it is "the overcoming of the obduracy of the stone" that takes center stage in the "old order." Therefore I treat this as the "first" concern.

If the logic of the Hindu tradition, as first formulated in the Veda, rests in a response to the closure of sacred space, to the obduracy of stone, then where does Mehta specifically point in order to support such an interpretation? Though not explicitly citing his references, Mehta all the same deploys one very popular myth, one that is most easy to locate – the *deva* Indra slays the *asura* Vṛtra (*Ṛgveda* I.32).[12] In fact, it is this myth that Mehta labels "the primal myth of the Indian tradition, the killing of the dragon Vṛtra," and as such it is in this myth that we must locate Mehta's *Ur-dichtung* (RV 283). That is to say, it must be here that Mehta discovers the root and soil of his Hindu logic.

Recognizing the popularity of the myth, while also considering the focus of the present project, I will here limit the treatment of *Ṛgveda* I.32 to those motifs that directly concern Mehta's logic.[13] To begin, the myth announces the heroic deeds of Indra. "He killed the dragon and pierced an opening for the waters." Immediately we encounter the themes of the *deva* and the *asura*, Indra and Vṛtra, and I propose, self and other, as well as the releasing of waters, the negating of constriction/closure through the creation of an opening. Significantly, the trope of "Vṛtra," for Mehta, means "literally the force that covers and hides, blocks and thwarts" (RV 283). In this way, Vṛtra negates his other. Mehta, however, does not limit such characteristics to Vṛtra. In fact, the *asuras* in the Veda all seem to represent some type of denial or exclusion. For instance, in addition to Vṛtra, Mehta points to Vala and the Pani demons: "Another myth with a metaphor at its core is that of the demon Vala, *the encloser*, *the cavity that shuts in*" (RV 283); "an allied myth is that of the Pani demons who have *hidden the cattle-treasure* in the mountains. Literally, a *pani* is the hoarder of treasures, the miser who does not part with it without obtaining its price" (RV 284). In the old order, the Vedic order, the *asura*/demon/other closes itself off from its other. It hordes its own being; it thwarts its other, that is, it thwarts the self.

Thus can we immediately infer Indra's antecedent condition: that which "covers and hides, blocks and thwarts" initially opposes Indra. Taken as a cosmogony, the myth suggests that Indra's other, that is, Vṛtra, in no way depends upon Indra for its

[12] Again, it is important to keep in mind that I am not presenting an exhaustive catalogue of all of Mehta's comments on the Vedas. Instead, I want to address those references that fill out the first stage of the old order. In this way, those references that I do analyze are chosen because they specifically resonate with his comments concerning the epics and the Purāṇas as well.

[13] I will be using the translation Mehta employs (RV 283) but does not explicitly cite.

being. Vṛtra's stony obduracy is already there. Consequently, Vṛtra thwarts Indra; *asura* thwarts *deva*; other thwarts self. Indra is his other's other. Indra is other. Vṛtra thus introduces a lack: Vṛtra is what Indra does not constitute.[14] Such a lack, such a challenge to his authority is unacceptable to the would-be sovereign self. Indra has not the other's possession. Indra is the thwarted self. Vṛtra's negation incites Indra's heroics. Indra must colonize the radical alterity of Vṛtra that fails to reciprocate.[15] According to Mehta, Indra is "power itself" and "his is the ability to execute an action… *sheer force of will*" (RV 282; emphasis added).

Indra, through his "sheer force of will," negates precisely that which "covers and hides, blocks and thwarts." For Mehta's logic, Indra's heroic act negates the negation. Notably, W. Halbfass, while concurring with F. B. J. Kuiper, recognizes the import of this "negation": "Of course, F. B. J. Kuiper observes correctly that Indra's act presupposes the existence of an undifferentiated totality…. Yet the fascination is not with the amorphous primeval substance or substrate as such, but with… its *negation*" (1992: 30, emphasis added).[16] Indra must negate precisely that which holds itself within itself, that which in effect refuses relationship.[17] Indra establishes himself only by separating this other, by forcing the other to respond through the relinquishing of the waters, itself symbolic of the newfound dynamic reciprocity – "an intensely dynamic field, with incessant transaction" (RV 279). It would seem that Indra comes into his own only by establishing *a transactional relationship* to the other, thereby reducing the other's thwarting alterity.

Upon the slaying of the *asura*, the release of the waters, and the setting up of "celestial and terrestrial space," the body of the demon fell to the depths of the waters. "In the midst of the waters which never stood still or rested, the body lay. The waters flow over Vṛtra's secret place; he who found Indra an overpowering

[14] Taylor notes in this regard, "In this way the other introduces a lack, and this opens a gap or creates a void in the subject" (1984: 24).

[15] "If the other fails to mirror the self, its territory must be invaded and colonized" (Taylor 1984: 29). Furthermore, Alan Roland notices a pervasive theme in Hindu psychology that directly addresses the anger elicited from the one for whom the other's denial is provocative: "Since expectations for reciprocity and fulfillment are high, disappointments small and large are not infrequent in the hierarchical intimacy relationships, resulting in hurt feelings and at times considerable anger" (1988: 229). Elsewhere he writes, "If… reciprocity is not forthcoming, angry – sometimes bitter – feelings may result" (1988: 251). It may be of interest to note that we also read in the Tamil literary tradition the following from Cuntaramurtti: "Separation, even from a demon, is horrible" (O'Flaherty 1988: 176).

[16] On a psychoanalytic register, Kakar suggests: "Whether all that is 'not-I' will forever remain vaguely threatening, replete with forebodings of an undefined nature, a danger to be avoided, or whether the infant will emerge from this phase feeling that the outside world is benevolently disposed and basically trustworthy; whether a reassuring sense of inner continuity and wholeness will predominate over a sense of falling to pieces and life forever lived in disparate segments: these are some of the developmental questions which originate in infancy" (1981: 53).

[17] Elsewhere Mehta speaks of the response of the mortals to the gods as that which establishes a channel of communication (RV 276). The point here is that Vṛtra hordes its treasures, that is, will not respond and thereby establish a channel of communication.

enemy lay in long darkness."[18] Of central importance here is not necessarily that Vṛtra is defeated, but that the slain demon does not simply disappear. He remains in darkness. Though his potency seems stripped, Vṛtra and his structural *secrecy* conspicuously remain. Even in the midst of the unconstricted waters, in the midst of the opening, lies constriction, closure, alterity overcome "to some degree." Kuiper notes in this regard, "The Asuras had been driven away but not annihilated. They were not part of the cosmos but continued to exist beyond the pale, as a constant menace to the existence and coherence of the ordered world" (1983: 17).[19] That Indra had once defeated the other does not preclude the possibility of concealment and secrecy, a possibility and anxiety that apparently haunted the Vedic imagination (a point to which I will return shortly). "The Vedic poets knew about the play of concealment and revealment from their own experience," writes Mehta (RV 288).

Vṛtra's enduring opacity notwithstanding, the myth conspicuously closes with an emphasis on the sovereignty of the heroic Indra: "Indra is the king of all beings and rules over all peoples as their king, encircling all as a rim encircles the spokes." Indra's negation of the negation, though seemingly incomplete as Kuiper points out, nonetheless ushers in his sovereign and autonomous rule. Through the tropes of Indra and Vṛtra, Mehta's work on the *Ṛgveda* discloses, I suggest, the central activity of overcoming the "thwarted self."[20] This strange eroticism, in turn, resonates directly with a colonial politics tropically marked here by a rim and spokes. Indeed, and borrowing from Mark C. Taylor, I suggest that for Mehta Indra's "satisfaction emerges when previously servile subjects achieve sovereignty by discovering self in other. If the other fails to mirror the self, *its territory must be invaded and colonized*" (1984: 29, emphasis added). With this in mind, we now read from Mehta: "the Pani demons… have *hidden the cattle-treasure* in the mountains." Associating Indra's conquest of Vṛtra to the defeat of the Pani demons, Mehta observes that Indra is "the lord of all… master of the cows" (RV 282). We are thus led to understand that Indra in some way covets the other's possession. Indra is incomplete without the other's possession and reciprocity. Precisely for this reason, Mehta characterizes Indra as "the invincible power of breaking through, shattering obstacles, *overcoming concealment*" (RV 282-283; emphasis added). The "cosmogonic" act is thus an aggressive campaign to overcome the transcendent darkness and constriction of the obdurate other in an attempt to establish the sovereignty of the thwarted self.

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[18] Here I borrow from O'Flaherty's translation in *Hindu Myths* (1975) because she includes an interesting translation of "secret place."

[19] Though Kuiper is explicitly directing this remark to a myth concerning Varuna, it nevertheless holds as a general statement. Compare, "*Asat*, the primordial world of chaos, was not entirely replaced by the cosmos but continued to exist on the fringes of this world and as a perpetual menace to the latter's existence" (1983: 19).

[20] "In an effort to establish the equilibrium of the ego," Taylor notes in this regard, "the subject tries to exclude, dominate, or incorporate everything different from itself" (1987: 92).

If the myth of Indra and Vṛtra is the primal myth of the Hindu tradition, as Mehta certainly contends, then we now ask, what was the meaning of this myth to the Vedic *ṛṣis*? Paraphrasing the *ṛṣis'* sentiments, Mehta writes, "'Let the threads that bind us to divinity not be broken, let the sacred threads by which we weave the coloured web of our song remain intact. May we not lose the track of the paths that run between the gods and men…. May we not lose sight of the *trace* left behind by the bird in flight.' That, in sum, was the single, all-overriding concern of the Vedic Rishis, as in every subsequent phase of Indian religious life" (HT 107).[21] Here Mehta makes a rather strong claim, and so we must be sure of his prose. He certainly suggests that there was a concern with losing the relationship between man and the transcendent, repeating Indra's desire for a relationship to his other. But notice the characterization of the "divinity." Mehta speaks of a "trace." A relationship to the *trace*, whether by means of "threads" or "vision," Mehta ultimately argues, is the "all-overriding concern" for Indian religious life then and now. Is a relationship to the trace the preservation of the Holy in human living?

"Trace," according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is a "visible mark or sign of the former presence or passage of a person, thing or event" as well as "a path or a trail through a wilderness that has been beaten out by the passage of animals or people." Mehta deliberately uses "trace," I suggest, in order to employ such readings. The first signifies the structural antecedence of the sacred represented here by the "bird in flight," that which had gone ahead always and already, and here we can point to Indra's heroic deeds. Notice though that the Vedic *ṛṣis* want not that which left the trace, e.g., Indra, but rather the trace itself. Significantly, the trace appears as that which signifies what does not show up. The trace signifies the present absence of totality. In this way, the trace precludes static immanence by maintaining an other with whom relationship can be maintained. The second theme signifies that that which is left behind by such formal antecedence is just such a clearing, an opening, a path by which to travel through the wilderness, or perhaps in Vedic terms, *asat*, variously translated as "non-being" or "chaos." The trace marks the structural *opening* that Indra first cleaved/articulated, that is, "the track of the paths that run between the gods and men." The Vedic *ṛṣis* are ever in Indra's debt for having cleared the way by overcoming the radical alterity of Vṛtra: "Indra discovered the light for the *Arya*" (RV 279). Indra's trace in effect affords the opening through which relationship is established. After all, Mehta points to the centrality of "*a contractual relationship* between truth and the gods, between gods and men" (HT 113; emphasis added). Resonating directly with our discussion of "temple," Indra's opening, his trace, affords the free space for binary oppositions, for relationship as such. Mehta explicitly states in this regard, "This is a space that must be cleared for an open channel of communication to be established between man and the gods" (RV 280). Elsewhere he argues, "Without the free space of such an opening, there can be neither light nor darkness, neither presence nor absence of anything, neither

[21] The footnote to this indicates that Mehta understood this quote as one that "gathers together, in literal translation, thoughts scattered in the Ṛgveda."

adequation or correspondence, nor certitude, as conceived in the ordinary sense of truth" (RV 290).[22] Without the spacing of this relationship, there is closure.

Mehta contends that losing sight of this trace and thus opening was a *terror* the Vedic *ṛṣi* ever sought to prevent. He writes:

> It is not the infinite spaces of such a world, one piled on top of another, that fills Vedic man with terror. If there is anything that does so, it is *Nirrti*, inner disintegration, the falling apart that destroys the domain of possibility itself. (10.164.1) It is *abhvam*, the black abyss of darkness…. It is *amhas*, the sense of being hemmed in and trapped, constriction, the anguish of space closing in. (RV 279)

Here Mehta speaks of "disintegration," "falling apart," "space closing in." Taken in conjunction with "the trace left behind by the bird in flight," we see Mehta suggest that Vedic man's concern is indeed with maintaining a *relationship* to that which *transcends*, a relationship for which an opening is indispensable. This is Indra's concern. Mehta directs our reading of "disintegration" as a "dis-integration," that is, the notion of two joined together in relationship, integrated, for only as such could there be a "falling apart." (And here this relationship converges with Heidegger's *das Selbe*.) Dis-integration effects "space closing in." Without a relationship to the transcendent other (Indra's initial condition), the self apparently gets lost in immediacy/immanence, and as such loses himself in the "anguish of space closing in." Should self and other fall apart, self and other would be "hemmed in and trapped."

Recalling Mehta's link between the *Ṛgveda* and the Upaniṣads, we now ask to what extent Vedic "terror" converges with Upaniṣadic "dread"? Mehta writes, "The presence of the Other, the Upanishad says, is the source of all dread" (ET 7). The Upaniṣad's dread, I propose, shares a structural affinity to "the anguish of space closing in." In this way, Mehta indirectly suggests that the Vedic Vṛtra is the Upaniṣad's dreadful Other. Indra was thus motivated by dread. Indra and Vṛtra "engage in a life-and-death struggle that is inspired by the 'absolute fear' that grows out of 'the first encounter of the other as *other*'" (Taylor 1984: 23).[23] Indra's heroic aggression for Mehta's *svadhā* is stimulated, I propose, by the "presence of the

[22] Mehta is not alone in recognizing the significance of an "opening" in Vedic thought. Halbfass notes, "The old Vedic texts, in particular the *Ṛgveda*, leave no doubt as to Vedic man's fascination with openness and unobstructed space" (1992: 30). Elsewhere Halbfass writes, "the idea of a primeval opening, separation, holding apart is of extraordinary importance in Vedic cosmogony, and it remains a significant, though often forgotten presupposition in later developments of Indian thought" (1988: 317). Is Halbfass pointing to the unthought in Indian thought? Is Halbfass's "forgotten presupposition" Mehta's *svadhā*? Has Mehta in his hermeneutic vigilance tapped into the Hindu tradition's "forgotten presupposition"? Again from Halbfass, we read, "The distinct entities that appear in the Vedic openness cannot be described as mere modifications of a primeval substance or substrate. Rather, their appearance implies the *negation* of such substantiality. It implies *novelty* and *contingency*… the creation of that very 'nothing' in which contingent existence is possible" (1992: 31, emphasis added). Here Halbfass unequivocally points to the novelty and contingency that ensues from Indra's negation of the negation, two themes of central importance to Mehta's hermeneutics.

[23] Consider Emanuel Levinas's comment in this regard: "From its infancy philosophy has been struck with a horror of the other that remains other" (1986: 346).

Other… the source of all dread," by the "horror of the other that remains other." As long as "the Vṛtra-most Vṛtra" (Mehta's phrasing, i.e., "the most-thwarting thwarting") remains, Indra's, that is, the self's sense of well being (signified here by the tropes of rim and spokes) is incomplete. Indra's own being is called into doubt, that is, thwarted by the alterity of the other; otherwise, Mehta would not write, "Indra's very existence needs a reassuring affirmation" (RV 288). Clearly, Indra's welfare depends upon a reciprocal, and perhaps totalizing, relationship to the other. "For the Vedanta philosophy of the Upanishads," Mehta points out, "it [i.e., immortality] is a possible mode of human existence in which there is *fullness of ontological awareness*, *in which all alienation is overcome*, the alienation of self with self, of self with others, of self with world, of self with Being in its own truth" (ET 7; emphasis added). Elsewhere he notes, "Brahman is *sat* (Being), the ground of all that is, including my own being, which is of the nature of sheer, pure *chit* (awareness, of which 'knowing' is itself a derivative mode) and potentially capable of *rising above all otherness and, therefore, pure bliss*" (HV 247; emphasis added). Otherness, for Mehta's "old order," is the source of dread precisely to the extent to which it engenders in the self, in Indra, an alienation, a lack. Consequently, Indra's rim signifies the plenitude of being, pure bliss.

In this "primal myth," Mehta thus discerns, I suggest, an element of Sudhir Kakar's Hindu psychology. Kakar recognizes a dreadful fear of the radical other in South Asia. He interprets the ideal of *mokṣa* most pertinent to the Vedānta (i.e., Upaniṣads) as a process of fusion whereby the other loses precisely its threatening alterity. "If the concept of *mokṣa* incorporates the ideal of fusion," notes Kakar, "implicitly it also defines the Hindu's personal and cultural sense of *hell*, *separation from others and from the 'Other'*." (1981: 36, emphasis added). Without a dynamic relationship with Vṛtra, Indra is alienated from his other and thus from himself. Indra's thwarted self needs reaffirmation. "The yearning for the confirming presence of the loved person in its positive as well as negative manifestation – the distress aroused by her or his unavailability or unresponsiveness in time of need – is the dominant modality of social relations in India" (Kakar 1981: 86). Is it not precisely the unresponsiveness of Vṛtra in Indra's time of need that arouses Indra's distress? If that to which the self reaches out fails to return the gesture, then the self is thrown back on itself without relation or transcendence. The self is hemmed in, a cultural hell. If the other remains radically other, then the self remains incomplete, that is, he is bound to himself in *fatal* immediacy. Kakar also notes in this regard, "The fear of *death*… contains… the fear of unimaginable loneliness, emptiness and desolation in the state of separation" (1981: 35). Accordingly, the Upaniṣads, for Mehta, continuing the Vedic concern, say "yes to that *other dimension*, beyond beings and yet in them, the dimension from which all is-ness derives, which is the primordial *openness* and truth and which is also the dimension of the holy, that '*Wesenraum*' of Divinity" (HV 257; emphasis added). The other, the *asura*, Vṛtra, thwarts a relationship with and in the self and thus denies the "*Wesenraum*," or the open room for the Divine, the Holy. To preserve the Holy in human living, which is the overriding concern in Hinduism according to Mehta, is *to preserve the opening* that at this point is a negation of the primeval substance/other, or a negation of the negation.

Recognizing the "ever present possibilities to which the mortal condition is subject [e.g., the relapse into closure]," the Vedic poets must, in effect, repeat Indra's heroic deeds. After all, "Indra is the prototypical *rishi* and poet" (RV 275). "To quote the poet, 'The divine *rsis* joined the *challenger* Indra; they brought forth great light out of darkness'" (RV 283; emphasis added). In fact, the ritual repetition and maintenance of Indra's opening was significantly an original connotation of *dharman/dharma*. "It [i.e., the upholding of the open space] means preventing them [i.e., the polarities and distinctions that exist within this space] from collapsing, merging in an undifferentiated and unidentifiable unity and totality," Halbfass argues, "The cosmogonic acts or events have to be repeated in the rituals; that is, the act of *dharman/dharma*. The connection of *dharma* with *dhṛ* (*dharay*; cf. also *vi-dhṛ*), 'to support,' 'to uphold,' is not only an etymological one" (1988: 317). Both Indra and the *ṛṣis* challenge the obduracy of the other. Both want to overcome their thwarted selves. The fullness of being cannot be achieved so long as an alienating other is outstanding.

Precisely to these ends, Mehta characterizes Indra not only as "sheer force of will," but also, and significantly, he speaks of Indra's "insatiable thirst for Soma." This is important when we realize that Soma, for Mehta, "represents the ultimate end of human spiritual endeavor, *the fullness of awareness*, potency and joy, in short, *immortality*…. Soma bestows on the mortal this *plenitude of being*" (RV 282). Indra, and by extension the Vedic *ṛṣi*, has an "insatiable thirst" for the "plenitude of being." Like philosophy and its incomplete present, Indra's "insatiable thirst" actually betrays his *lack* of the "plenitude of being." This "insatiable thirst" for the "plenitude of being" comes to dominate the Vedic horizon. Mehta writes of seeking to "experience that integral plenitude" (HT 116) of Brahman that is "potentially capable of rising above all otherness and, therefore, pure bliss" (HV 247). But how exactly did the *ṛṣis* experience that integral plenitude? How did they repeat Indra's deeds?

Indra shattered Vṛtra with his thunderbolt. Mehta writes, "The central image in all these myths is that of light encapsulated within a rock which Indra liberates with his power of shattering the impenetrable, the thunderbolt, which in turn is often the symbol for *poetic speech*" (RV 284). Indra overcomes the obdurate Vṛtra/other through "poetic speech." As for Heidegger and Gadamer, so for Mehta's interpretation, language for the Vedic *ṛṣi* did not correspond with an objective and transcendent world; rather, language is the opening, the articulation, the disclosure as such.[24] By means of poetic disclosure, the seers/Indra first articulate a world of context and meaning, of light and shadow, of relationship. "Saying in this primary sense," Mehta writes, "is showing something, letting it appear, be heard and seen, emancipating it into its own, in a manner both revealing and concealing, the dispensing of world and

[24] Heidegger writes, "Projective saying is poetry: the saying of world and earth, the saying of the arena of their conflict and thus of the place of all nearness and remoteness of the gods. Poetry is that saying of the unconcealedness of what is. Actual language at any given moment is the happening of this saying, in which a people's world historically arises for it and the earth is preserved as that which remains closed" (1971: 74).

Being" (LR 62).[25] Indra's thunderbolt, his poetic speech, overcomes the other by breaking the other open and making manifest that which lay in the enclosure, i.e., dynamic waters. Vṛtra remains, opacity remains, yet as part of the dynamic play of "revealing and concealing." Speaking of the Vedic *ṛṣi* and his "well-formed *sūkta* ('poetic verse')," Mehta writes, "It establishes a channel of communication between man and the deities… it becomes a thread that binds them together" (RV 276). Poetic articulation is the thread relating self to other that the Vedic *ṛṣis* ever sought to maintain.

One final matter to be considered concerning Mehta's "old order" involves a reflection on agency and initiative. Recall Mehta's indication that the Vedic *ṛṣis* are respondents. Indra had to respond. The self has to respond. "He [i.e., man] stands helpless," Mehta argues, "on this impenetrable earth, as inscrutably earthy, but he is open to the heavens and *responsive* to the shining ones (*devas*) above, who are eager themselves to respond *to his call*, to enkindle a light in the darkness within, without and underneath him" (RV 279). I suggest that there is a curious ambivalence with regard to "response" at this first stage in Mehta's hermeneutical development. The sense of response is certainly present in the Indra myth, i.e., Indra has to respond to Vṛtra's stony silence. But is Vṛtra's silence truly an address warranting a *response*? Or rather, is it precisely the lack of address on Vṛtra's part that incites Indra's aggressive initiative? After all, Vṛtra is the "obduracy of the stone." I propose that for Mehta's logic, Indra's "response" is an initiative. After all, the Vedic poet-seers significantly join "the challenger." In this way, if the Vedic rites were a repetition of the first "cosmogonic" act, as both Halbfass and Mehta suggest, then Vedic "aletheio-poiesis" is also aggressive, a challenge. Recall, there was a *fear* of closure, of radical alterity. A concern with the *self's* alienation motivates the need to conquer the other. Indra, as the prototypical *ṛṣi*, therefore fashioned the "*Ur- Brahman*," which in truth is the goddess *Vak*, "speech and language." "It is she herself [i.e., Vak] who is the thunderbolt (*vajra*) that destroys the Vṛtra that covers the truth of things" (RV 287). The "*weapon* of *brahman*" (RV 280; emphasis added) aids Indra's aggressive challenge.

Mehta eventually, not to mention curiously, characterizes Indra's/the *ṛṣis'* aggressive initiative as "hospitality." "Man, if he is an *arya* (i.e., hospitable to the guest from beyond, open to transcendence) and a Brahmana dedicated to his creative vocation of 'wording the world', has but one all-consuming passion, the unceasing pursuit of light" (RV 279). The *ārya* is hospitable to the guest from beyond. Yet hospitality would seem to be an aggressive reaching out to "welcome" the other. Hospitality in the old order is an unceasing pursuit whose initial challenge clearly

[25] On a comparative register, Taylor notes with respect to the Jewish tradition, "Like Yahweh whose creative word brings form to formlessness by separating the primal waters, language is poetic insofar as it creates through an act of separation" (1987: 54). Elsewhere Taylor notes, "For the poet, language is not descriptive, referential, or representational; it is performative. The performance of the modern and postmodern writer is actually a substitute for the performance of religious ritual" (1987: 143).

rests with the self (a point Mehta’s work on the *Mahābhārata* will corroborate). The Vedic *ārya pursues* the light. Accordingly, hospitality in the Veda structurally entails agential initiative. But perhaps in this way, Indra, and those who repeat his deeds, is not really hospitable. Consider John D. Caputo’s gloss on “hospitality”:

> Welcoming is really welcoming when it welcomes the “stranger,” when it does so truly, without falling back into a “domestic hospitality” which tries to force the stranger to conform to domestic standards and remain within *the closed communal circle of the same*. Welcoming must practice an “absolute hospitality,” welcoming the stranger without preconditions. (1997: 145).[26]

I propose that Indra’s rim converges here with “the closed communal circle of the same.” In other words, what we see through Mehta’s essays on “the Vedic root” is the poetry of the *Ṛgveda* as a “hospitable” repetition of the *domesticating* deeds of Indra, a repetition tied to the aggressive maintenance of relationship, a “challenging welcome.” In the old order, this “welcoming” is done in the name of overcoming incompletion by bringing the other near, by establishing a non-alienating relationship, by overcoming the thwarted self: after all, “The Vedic poet… ensures *inalienable nearness* to the sacred” (HT 107; emphasis added).

The “Great Beginning” of the Indian tradition, the locus of the “old order,” thus introduces the conflict between self and wholly other; between openness, dynamism and relationship, and that which keeps concealed and hidden in immediate and static totality. Thus far the tropes of *devas* and *asuras*, or gods and demons, as well as the theme of “aggressive hospitality” are of central importance in Mehta’s “old order.” It is indeed the heroics of Indra that provide the *arché* of the Indian religious tradition for Mehta. In both the Veda and the Upaniṣads, there is an overcoming of the dreadful alienation due to the other *as* other. The thwarted self aggressively reaffirms itself. This being said, Mehta’s essays suggest that the logic of the Hindu tradition involves a disappearance of these gods and, as we will see, these masculine heroics as well. As the tradition grows, and Vedic Sanskrit gives way to classical Sanskrit, we see the once-central gods come to share their lead roles with the humans. For Mehta, we especially see this in the *Mahābhārata*, the second of his hermeneutic focal points, the transitional literature ushering in the “new” order.

## 5.3 The Transition: The *Mahābhārata*, “Nihilisitic Narcissism,” and the Economy of Friendship

Arguing for a unifying, though dynamic, logic to the Hindu tradition, Mehta recognizes an inter-textuality between the *Ṛgveda* and the *Mahābhārata*. “The epic narrative,” he writes, “parallels in some ways and even bears a direct inter-textual

[26] As I will demonstrate later in the chapter, the *gopīs* repeat Indra’s “hospitality” by foregoing the aggression and thereby they resonate more with Caputo’s sense of hospitality.

relation to Vedic mythopoiesis" (K 122). Mehta suggests that the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas of the *Mahābhārata* are tropic substitutions for the Vedic *devas* and *asuras* respectively. In this way, the epic's Great War repeats the celestial war: "The fratricidal war between the two [i.e., the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas] re-enacts on earth the war between gods and demons" (K 122). While the Vedic concern with openings and free spaces continue to resonate in the epic literature, Mehta's writings suggest that with the epic we move from a meditation on overcoming the obduracy of the other to overcoming "the impediment presented by fortifications against friendly solicitations from realm of the divine and the true." This is the "second" concern.

The popular television series that today disseminates the text of the *Mahābhārata* in a truly novel way notwithstanding, Mehta feels that the central themes of the epic are no longer operative within the contemporary horizon. Such classical themes like *puruṣārthas*, *āśramas*, *siddhas, munis*, and *dharmaśāstra* no longer give rise to viable possibilities in the modern world. Here of course we think of Mehta's post-colonial hermeneutics. "All these ideas have become alien and largely meaningless to our modern way of experiencing the world," Mehta contests, "dead ideas without the power to move us in our collective endeavor at becoming developed and without relevance to our problems as a 'developing society'" (DV 255). India's temple is indeed in ruins. Nevertheless, Mehta feels that, as with the *Ṛgveda* so too for the *Mahābhārata*, there remain untapped possibilities in a renewed relationship with the text.

> The great epic lives, I submit, because it is a work of superb poetic craftsmanship and imaginative vigour, not yet fully explored, because it has the continuing power to nourish and enlarge our imagination, because the story it tells and the realm of meanings it opens up can give us a glimpse of our human situation, of the reality of what *is*, the relentlessness with which what *must* be *approaches us*, and the freedom that can be ours if we are mindful of the *realm of possibility* which *always remains open*. (DV 255; emphasis added)

Mehta here suggests that in the *Mahābhārata* there is an indication, in an imaginative and poetic idiom to be sure (after all Mehta himself suggests, "I believe… that such talk [i.e., God-talk and Man-talk] finds its most valid basis in poetic discourse, which speaks directly to our *religious imagination*, rather than in *properly philosophical discourse*" {K 121}), of "the reality of what *is*." Recognizing that the epic may not succumb to a full "demythologization," Mehta is nevertheless concerned with teasing out certain discernible structures in the text. Of importance here is to see that "the reality of what is," an indication grounded in the temporal present, is immediately qualified by the "relentlessness" of that which "must be approaches us." Here Mehta intimates a complex temporality, not merely an immediate present concerned with some*thing* in time.[27] The "reality of what *is*" is ultimately constituted

[27] Elsewhere Mehta references this complex temporality: "The attempt to recapture what once was, the voice that was once heard and the event that once happened, in the perspective of an open future that can be ours, is the only way in which we can be liberated into and for our true present and see our religious present for what it really is" (PIU 123).

by a structural future that relentlessly approaches, and notice of course that this *is* an approaching, not an arrival. The temporality of the "what is" is thus significantly supplemented by the approaching "what must be," by the future. But also notice that an approaching future that "must be" carries its necessity by means of a past that demands such a future. The present, much like Dasein, is thus caught in an in-between, in between a forever already past that conditions an always already outstanding, yet approaching, future. Mehta writes in this regard, "It [viz., the epic] is poetry mindful of the past but reaching out to the future, so as to comprehend the human condition in its *complex* totality. It talks of the past… only to be able to convey something vital to the future" (KD 217). In such temporal distension lies not only the "depth and height" missed by objectifying anthropological discourse, but also the *open realm of possibility* into which the irreducible moment of decision situates itself. In other words, the *Mahābhārata*, for Mehta, depicts a present that is forever already open to a future that must approach due to an event already taken place, and in this radical temporality dwells man's projection into the always-open realm of possibilities, a realm of freedom and decision. The epic thus repeats the Vedic concern with "openings." Yet the epic's emphasis is now fully on the *human's* condition as an ethical agent, which, as we will discuss below, involves being thrown into a contextual situation that demands action. To this extent, the *Mahābhārata* is a lesson in, a poetics of, human being, and it is to read the text in such a light that Mehta finds most rewarding. "Whatever a sociologically oriented study of the epic may have to say on this," he argues, "a reader who takes it as poetry or as an imaginative verbal structure encompassing a total vision of human life in its necessity, actuality and possibility, should not find it difficult to penetrate beneath all caste-talk to the deeper meaning underlying it" (DV 259).

Mehta ultimately points to two conflicting themes that govern the text. "The *Mahābhārata* is a tale of unmitigated violence and yet its central message, repeated again and again, is that non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) and compassion (*anrisamsya*) are the highest duties of man, states of being without which we fail to be completely human" (DV 256). The *Mahābhārata*, argues Mehta, is ultimately not about physical violence. The narrative discourse as moralizing discourse refuses complicity with mere aggression. "The ever recurring refrain, 'where there is *dharma*, there is victory,'" he writes, "testifies to the basic moralizing impulse behind the discourse of violence in the epic, i.e. behind its specific way of talking about violent death and all-engulfing ruin" (DV 262). Violence certainly jumps off the pages of the *Mahābhārata*. Its most famous section, a section that stands alone in the Indian tradition as one of the classical *prasthānatraya*, viz., the *Bhagavad Gītā*, finds as its very context a battlefield prior to a war of all-engulfing proportions.[28] How then are we to understand

[28] The *prasthānatraya* refers to the Upaniṣads, the *Brahma Sūtras* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. It was understood that any system claiming its status as a Vedānta had to produce a commentary on each of these three texts. Though it may be mentioned here that Rāmānuja never produced a systematic commentary on the Upanisads.

this violence, non-violence, and compassion? Perhaps the Great War in the *Mahābhārata* speaks to the human situation by way of existential metaphors. Is the violent battle depicted in the epic ultimately the "battle of life" as Mehta repeatedly suggests? (DV, 258, 265 & K, 123, 134) Does Kṛṣṇa not counsel Yudhiṣṭhira thusly, "You have not yet completed the conquest of your enemies, for the chief and sole enemy is within you"? (DV 270) Elsewhere Mehta writes, "Yudhiṣṭhira… has still to fight the battle within himself" (K 133). The *Mahābhārata's* ultimate battle for Mehta is therefore "not with an *other*, but with your own self." It would seem that Indra's Vṛtra has been internalized. Is this in fact the case?

If the centrality of the Gods in the Vedas are somehow displaced but not simply excluded by an emerging emphasis on the human condition and its capacity for non-violence and compassion, then it seems plausible to initiate our inquiry into Mehta's reading of the *Mahābhārata* by asking how "man" (for Mehta) is depicted in the text. Answering that question, we will proceed to ask the following questions: Who is the demon? Who is the god? What is the relationship between god and man? And finally, what is violence and non-violence in the epic?

Who is "man" in the *Mahābhārata*? Mehta points to Arjuna. As the "bodily form of paradigmatic man," "Arjuna represents the quintessential man, as the striving, active *nara*, strengthened by age-long ascesis to face life" (K 122, 123). Man is the "striving, active" one, the one who pursues, who quests. Arjuna, in fact, repeats Indra's "sheer force of will": "Arjuna… incarnates the essence of Indra" (K 122). But if Arjuna "incarnates the essence of Indra," and we suggested earlier that Indra suffers the condition of the "thwarted self," does this not entail that Arjuna too suffers the condition of the "thwarted self"? Recall, the thwarted self perceives the other's obdurate alterity as a provocation, if not a threat. If this is in fact the case, then should we not expect that Arjuna shares Indra's insatiable thirst for the plenitude of being (i.e., Soma), a plenitude that putatively restores the missing element that is the other? Reading Arjuna as representative of the universal man or "*Nara*," Mehta writes in no uncertain terms, "*Nara* is the eternal, imperishable Man *striving to attain fullness of being*" (K 124-125; emphasis added). The structural condition of Man/*Nara*/Arjuna, like that of Indra, thus reflects a lack. Arjuna is motivated by his incompletion, by his lack of the fullness of being. Arjuna, the thwarted self, implicitly harbors a metaphysical need.[29]

Arjuna is the epic manifestation of Indra and his "power," and like Indra, Arjuna finds himself already thrown into a provocative situation. "Arjuna is man the doer and achiever… Arjuna is man enmired in a life where action is called for at every moment, *without knowledge of the totality*" (K 127, emphasis added). Here Mehta directly points to his quintessential man, Arjuna, as a *factical*, and consequently *guilty*, man. Man must act in the world, yet his action cannot be in light of the whole. Man *lacks* "knowledge of the totality." Clearly, this is Arjuna's predicament at the outset of the *Bhagavad Gītā*: "Man acts in the world… always as if living in

[29] Derrida notes in this regard, "The name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology – in other words, throughout his entire history – has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play" (1978: 292).

a small circle of light that is surrounded by a vast darkness, where he knows little about the totality of invisible forces acting upon him from behind or about the eventual outcome of his actions" (DV 258). The factical predicament that is the lack of total knowledge leads to a myopia through which "height and depth" are easily lost sight of. "In life's battle," Mehta writes, deploying the violence in the epic as an existential metaphor, "man becomes captive to the immediacy of his situation, gets lost in its particularity" (K 131).

Now, if Man/*Nara*/Arjuna is the one who gets caught up in the immediacy of the immanent situation, unable to discern that which comes up from behind/the past or approaches from the front/the future, who then are the *asuras*, the demons? Mehta has already suggested that the demons are incarnate on the side of the Kauravas. That being said, we still want to know to whom does he point as an exemplar of the Kauravas/*Asuras*? He chooses Duryodhana: "If Arjuna is man as he fully may be, Duryodhana incarnates the sum of the demonic and the anti-human, *sheer will to power*" (K 129; emphasis added). The demons, the anti-humans, are those who manifest the "sheer will to power." Notice immediately the equivocation. Mehta suggests that Arjuna is an incarnation of Indra whose primary quality was his "sheer force of will." Now, Duryodhana as the incarnation of the *asura* is also characterized as "sheer will to power." What then is the distinction between incarnated *deva* and incarnated *asura*? What is the distinction between the "thwarted self" of Arjuna and what will unfold as the "nihilistic narcissism" of Duryodhana?

I propose that Mehta's work on the *Mahābhārata* indicates that Duryodhana's "sheer will to power" is inversely proportional to the Veda's "obduracy of the stone." That is to say (and this is what will eventually distinguish Arjuna from Duryodhana), Duryodhana's "sheer will to power" represents "the impediments to the friendly solicitations from the realm of the divine and the true" in much the same way as Vṛtra represents "the obduracy of the stone that blocks the wellsprings of sacrality." If, as Mehta argues, the war depicted in the *Mahābhārata* is ultimately a war between the man/gods and the demons, repeating the Vedic battle, then the demonic is now that which takes the self to be master of its own domain, without need of the other, and therefore, self-willed, "sheer will to power," or, and to be sure, *causa sui*. Indeed, Duryodhana tropically signifies the "one-sided pursuit of *artha*, of wealth and possessions, *of power over the means to satisfy our desires*" (DV 256; emphasis added). Duryodhana's is the "unbridled and sole pursuit of *artha*" (DV 257). While *artha* admits of many translations – as most significant concepts do in all cultural traditions – Mehta employs the term to indicate self-satisfaction, and this not only with reference to ontic wealth but more importantly to transcendental closure and perfection. As the preeminent pursuant of *artha*, Duryodhana is self-sufficiently autonomous, without need of the other, always seeking to impose his will in order to satisfy his wants. Notice that the heroics of Indra have now inverted themselves to become the "demonics" of Duryodhana. That is to say, if Indra's radical sovereignty of the old order lies in his "sheer force of will," Duryodhana's "sheer will to power" is a transitional revaluation of such authority and mastery. The radical overcoming/reduction of the other as other is not the desired outcome it was once thought to be. The transitional literature rethinks the rim.

Characterizing further the "demonic," and with respect to Śiśupāla, Mehta writes, "He is the anti-form of Krishna himself and represents the negative aspect of the latter as a human being, bent on denying the more than human in him" (K 128). The anti-form of Kṛṣṇa, Śiśupāla, denies man's capacity for relationship to the other, transcendence, insisting on immanence, the *asuric* will-to-power. Śiśupāla thus counters not only the Upaniṣadic "yea-saying," but also an epic "yea-saying" with a "no." With respect to the epic's "yes," Mehta writes, "Even the knowledge of Krishna… brings no transformation in the lives of those who do not say 'yes' to him in their heart of hearts" (K 130). Śiśupāla's "no" and Duryodhana's "no" thus represent, I propose, the narcissistic self's (i.e., the-once-thwarted-but-now-satisfied self's) negation of the transcendent's negation. Nihilistic narcissism reduces the other's height and exteriority. Narcissism satisfies only itself, a one-sided pursuit of *artha*. "Such is the power of *artha*, the slavery to which sucks them all into the vortex of death and destruction" (DV 257). Here Mehta points explicitly to the nihilism inherent in Duryodhana's narcissism. The nihilistically narcissistic self denies not only the transcendent other, but also denies the capacity for transcendence in the subject, which as we will see leads to its annihilation. To this extent, nihilism is sovereign subjectivism, which in turn converges with proprietary narcissism. Duryodhana repeats Indra's sovereignty.

If man is he who gets enmired in worldly concerns and as such loses sight of the larger picture, and the demon is he who, perhaps finding himself in a similar predicament, actively charges the situation in his Duryodhanic, and we must add Indric, will to power, then in Mehta's interpretation of the epic it is precisely the other's task to reach out and offer guidance, relationship, and ultimately *friendly solicitations*. Kṛṣṇa is this other. Indeed, Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*, while fully assuming human finitude, does not lose sight of the whole. Mehta explicitly contrasts Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa:

> In both *buddhi*, the alert awareness of the right means to successful action, is present in ample measure, except that, unlike Arjuna, Krishna's practical intelligence never loses sight of the encompassing horizon of such actions; he is capable of simultaneously concentrating on the particularity of an occasion, being mindful of the contextual totality and knowing that all action has a limited reach. (K 125)

Here Mehta points out that the god is the one who not only acts, as does man, but it is the god who can compass the horizon of such action. Not only this, but the god also recognizes the finitude of pure will to power, of human initiated action. To this extent, the god offers guidance, *niti*, to man. "'*Niti'* is guidance, policy, practical wisdom… qualities which Krishna exhibits variously throughout" (K 128). Man, forced to act in a situation of which he does not compass the entire horizon, is in need of guidance issuing from the other. I propose that guidance, *niti*, is the friendly solicitation to which Duryodhana responds with his narcissistic impediments. Here the difference between Arjuna's "sheer force of will" and Duryodhana's "sheer will to power" comes to light: the former does not refuse the other's initiative.

Mehta suggests that the relationship between man and god, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, is one of *friendship*. Concerning the "bond between man and God… Arjuna and Krishna," he writes, "… the principal word for the relationship between the divine and the human is 'friendship'" (K 123). Here Mehta *explicitly* returns to the "second" concern in the Veda, i.e., "*friendly* solicitations from the realm of the divine and

true." I propose that the structural element of most significance at this point is that the friend is *the other*: "Krishna is Arjuna's friend and *therefore an 'other'*" (K 124; emphasis added). The friend, in order to be a friend and thereby an other, must exceed the subject's intentional horizon. In other words, it is precisely the enmired forestructure of the factical self that fails to see beyond the particular situation that requires the guidance (provocation?) of the transcendent friend, the other. But again we sense an equivocation. Recall, Vṛtra was an other to Indra, and yet Vṛtra was no friend. What is the difference between the other that is friend and the other that is foe? Simply stated, the friend initiates a relationship with his other. The friend *reaches out* to his enmired other, refusing to remain within his own totality, the latter being of course the central characteristic of the Vedic *asuras*. Friendly advance thus overcomes the alienation that evokes dread in the Upaniṣads. The true friend, Kṛṣṇa, is indeed transcendent to his other, but it is precisely in the structure of friendship (at least as far as the transitional literature is concerned) that the transcendent friend reaches out to help his enmired other. Vṛtra, in this regard, is the opposite of the friend, for Vṛtra "blocks and thwarts." The *asuras*, the "demonic forces," are thus "beings which obstruct, disrupt or negate man's relationship to the divine" (K 122). *Asuras* obstruct relationship as such. Vṛtra kept closed up and constricted the dynamic waters. Duryodhana is self-contained, not open to the other, "sheer will to power," and Śiśupāla denies the more-than-human, the transcendence, in man. To the extent that the god/friend/other breaks the self open to that which lies beyond the exigent circumstances, he is a *tīrtha*. Mehta rhetorically asks, "Who can do without faith in the friend to enable us to act from a perspective that transcends our necessarily limited perception of our situation, as of the eventual outcome of our actions?" (K 127) As a *tīrtha*, the "other" that is friend is significantly not the "other" that is foe. The god opens; the demon closes.

For Mehta, epic friendship thus implies mutual belonging: "It is a relationship of mutual belongingness and love… of mutual giving" (K 123). Moreover, there is a "mutual implication of the human and divine," he argues, "the generic name for this relation of mutual involvement is friendship" (K 125). Here we see both the immanent self and the transcendent other entering into a mutuality, a relationship. In effect, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, through their reciprocity, overcome both Duryodhana and Vṛtra.[30] Mehta suggests that the mutuality between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna is in fact

[30] While Mehta juxtaposes Duryodhana and Arjuna, Derrida presents a similar juxtaposition between a king and a philosopher: "Now the tale, setting face-to-face a king and a philosopher… tends to mark a split between this proud independence, this freedom, this self-sufficiency [of the king] that claims to rise above the world, and a friendship which should agree to depend on and receive from the other…. The king… certainly honoured the pride of a sage jealous of his independence and his own freedom of movement; but the sage would have honoured his humanity better had he been able to triumph over his proud self-determination, his own subjective freedom; had he been able to accept the gift and the dependency – that is, this law of the other assigned to us by friendship, a sentiment even more sublime than the freedom or self-sufficiency of a subject" (1997: 63). Borrowing from Derrida, we note that for Mehta, Duryodhana is precisely such "proud self-determination" and "subjective freedom" that denies dependency upon the friend, that is refuses friendly solicitations. In opposition to Duryodhana's egomaniacal denials, Arjuna recognizes and even cherishes his dependency on the other.

responsible for (and resonating with Heidegger's *Lichtung*) the clearing, or trace, in the forest for "human settlement": "The friendship between them… has now been blessed by the gods. The forest has now been cleared" (K 127). Friendly others belong to each other in the opening, through the relationship (*das Selbe*). Supplementing the centrality of "compassion" and "non-violence" in the epic, Mehta writes, "If one were to pick out the one central *doctrine* that emerges here, it would be the conception… of God as Friend of Man and of Friendship as the ground word for *all authentic relation*, between man and man and between God and Man" (K 124; emphasis added). Mehta further characterizes friendship/relationship as one of "intimacy and selflessness," the latter certainly characterizing not the *asura* bent on *artha*. To this extent, we can discern an element of sacrifice here, a sense of foregoing of self for the sake of the other, the friend, a sense of self-subordination even in mutuality. This being said, I propose that the economy of mutual implication and belongingness presented as a friendship in the *Mahābhārata*, extending thereby the intertextuality with the Veda, fails to disclose completely the sacrifice, a disclosure Mehta saves for the "new" order of *bhakti* (to which we turn shortly).

The economic mutuality between God and man, between friends, retains all the same a trace of dissymmetry. That is to say, the other, not the self, *initiates* the friendship, offers friendly solicitations. "It is Krishna who first approaches Arjuna, seeks him out, makes the first gestures of friendship, reaches out to him as a true friend" (K 123). Elsewhere Mehta writes, "As his friend, Krishna always takes the *initiative*, anticipates his need, is forthcoming with advice and help and plans and steers his course when required without thought for himself" (K 127, emphasis added). Thus it is the god, the transcendent other, the friend, who takes the initiative, bears the initiatory burden, to which the self can only respond.[31] Recall that in the Veda, Indra, the self enjoyed agential initiative and the Vedic *ṛṣi* (the one who repeats Indra's deeds) was open and *hospitable* to the other. Here we see Mehta explicitly suggesting the inverse (corroborating our earlier reading concerning Indra's agency). He writes, "Krishna goes to meet him [i.e., Arjuna] and offers him his personal *hospitality*" (K 126; emphasis added). The subject of hospitality (and thus the agential subject) significantly shifts between the Veda and the epic. Whereas the "Vedic/thwarted self" was concerned with establishing and maintaining a relationship with the closed-off, transcendent other, the "epic other" is concerned with

[31] I cannot but help notice that we see here a myth model that resonates directly with Alan Roland's work (1988) on the "we-self" and the qualitative hierarchy. Roland suggests that a dominant trait of Hindu psychology concerns a relationship in which the qualitative superior (e.g., the father) is expected to anticipate empathically the needs of the inferior. The inferior, in turn, shows deference to the superior by responding with a filial piety. The activities of both enhance the self-esteem of the we-self. Here Mehta outlines a myth model for this type of behavior. I borrow the phrase "myth model" from Gananath Obeyesekere (1981). Obeyesekere suggests that certain cultures have models of behavior couched in their myths, models that help articulate the real relationships between individuals.

the closed-off self. The direction of petition is reversed. Kṛṣṇa's otherness does not remain bound to itself, and to this extent Kṛṣṇa compromises his radical alterity for Arjuna's sake. Mehta quotes Kṛṣṇa speaking to Arjuna: "There is no otherness between us" (K 128).[32] Though the structural element of the friend involves being an other, the otherness dealt with in friendship is not a self-contained otherness, and thus does not alienate the self. Rather, Kṛṣṇa empathically solicits Arjuna and thereby establishes a reciprocating relationship. Economically speaking, once Kṛṣṇa has made his initial petition to Arjuna, the channels of communication from that point on remain intact. Like the Vedic contractual relationship, Mehta speaks of a "pact" being sealed between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa. The paradigmatic friends are visibly present to one another, and so to a certain extent the structure of sacrifice, I argue once again, is not completely represented. The structure of sacrifice and the structure of friendly economy are antithetical.[33]

Though the self can only respond to the other's initiative, Mehta nevertheless suggests that the self always asks questions regarding the other's identity and worth. He writes, "In our everyday encounter with people, with ourselves, the question of identity that is bound to hit us at some point is: Who is he, what is he in reality, what is he to me? We never stop asking this question till the end of our mortal days, about the 'who' and about the relationship that binds us to another" (K 124). While such inquisitiveness resonates perhaps with a hermeneutic fusion and application, it ultimately fails the "sacrificial test." In a piece on the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Mehta curiously writes, "On being asked by Rāma who he was and why he came to his help, Garuḍa replied that he was his ancient *friend* but that Rāma *should not try to probe deeper* into this act of friendly loyalty" (MY 80; emphasis added). Here Mehta obliquely indicates a tension. Enmired man always asks questions concerning the other precisely because the other eludes the self's conceptual horizon. While Mehta seems to make a blanket statement here concerning the inevitability of man's inquisitive spirit, I nevertheless argue that Mehta's own texts suggest otherwise. In fact, I contend that it is merely at this second stage that we continue to see such inquiry. I propose that "the devoted self" in Mehta's texts, that is, the *bhakta*, provides an alternative to this seemingly essential inquisitive nature.

[32] Perhaps the *acintya-bhedābheda* (i.e., "the unthinkable difference-in-identity") of Vaiṣṇava theology is not so unthinkable. If we accept Roland's psychoanalytic reading of the "we-self" it becomes quite understandable. In effect, Roland argues that the superior and inferior share an empathic reciprocity and so to this extent the psychological self is intimately bound up with the self of the other. Through empathy reciprocity is *bhedābheda*.

[33] Jill Robins notes in this regard, "The sacrificer belongs to the world of violent and uncalculated generosity and consumption, namely, a realm of unlimited expenditure where utilitarian relations are suspended. Sacrifice… thus represents a certain departure from the boundaries of the restricted economy, from the enclosed system of reciprocal relations reducible to a utilitarian logic of means and ends." "Sacrifice" in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. M. C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 290.

Now that we have seen who man, demon, and god are in the epic, and in what friendship consists, we turn to Mehta's second major theme - violence. Mehta suggests that two of the key terms of the *Mahābhārata* are *kṣattra* and *brahma*. He writes, "The key words to be understood here are *kṣattra* and *brahma*, which are aggregates of qualities taken as embodied in, or functions exercised by, the two classes of men called *kshattriya* and *brahmana* respectively" (DV 259). Mehta here supplements his characterization of man as the enmired and active one by suggesting two further nuances. Mehta characterizes the *kṣattra* as "physical prowess and strength," while the *brahma* is "intellectual and spiritual power" (DV 259). On a "collective" level, the former represents "the power of state… its ability to *maintain* the *rule* of righteousness and *law*." The latter represents "the power of knowledge and wisdom, the ability to steer the ship of state by *foresight*" (DV 259; emphasis added). Of interest for us is that the *kṣattra*'s temporality is significantly tied to a present state of affairs, the maintenance of the law. It is also significantly tied to "physical prowess and strength," and thus suggests a continuity with "sheer force of will," and further "sheer will to power." In contrast, *brahma*'s temporality is always led by a certain knowledge of what is to come, a foresight. Mehta, to be sure, argues that the war in the epic is one fought between the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, the gods and the demons, but he goes further to argue that "this takes place within the wider design of the total annihilation of *kshattra*" (DV 260). Assuming the inter-textuality between the Veda and the *Mahābhārata*, we now see that the destruction of the *asuras* parallels the destruction of *kṣattra*. Therefore, we ought to draw a connection between the *asura*, *kṣattra*, "sheer will to power," "physical prowess and strength," and "the one-sided pursuit of *artha*."

At this point we need to recall not only Mehta's comments concerning the radical temporality of the *Mahābhārata's* message, but also that Kṛṣṇa tells Yudhiṣṭhira that he must conquer the foe within, for it is in reference to both of these concerns, I propose, that Mehta relates the episode from the epic concerning Yudhiṣṭhira's *Rājasūya* sacrifice. Mehta comments how all the *kṣatriya* princes gather to pay their respects to the most eminent among them, i.e., Yudiṣṭhira. We see Mehta's true concern in the following: "As Narada [a *brahman*] watches the *earthly glory* in which Yudhisthira was bathed, and gazes at the *kshattriyas* assembled there, he is overtaken by *anxious* thoughts and by the *memory* of what had transpired at Brahma's court" (DV 260-261; emphasis added). The *kṣatriyas*' celebration of "earthly glory" with "pomp and panoply" (K 128) stands in distinction to the thoughts of the *brahman*. Nārada, significantly the "knower of divine secrets," is *anxious* about the "approaching what must be": the "memory" of past events in "anxious" anticipation of what is to come circumscribe the *brahman's* thoughts. *Brahma* as opposed to *kṣattra* is privy to the "ancient and eternal secret of the gods." *Brahma's* temporality is complex as opposed to the simple present of the *kṣattra*. Stylistically, Nārada is alone in his memory and anticipation. Nārada's solitude represents the one resolutely mindful of temporality, i.e., authentic Dasein. On the other hand, and again stylistically, the *kṣatriyas* are multiple and represent man (*das Man*) lost in the immediacy of the moment.

As for Nārada's secret, it is nothing less than that the gods have vowed to have the *kṣatriyas* destroy each other at the end of the *yuga*. This is the case because *kṣattra*

and *brahma* have fallen into disproportion. The epic's age, i.e., the end of the *Dvāpara yuga*, witnesses the predominance of *kṣattra*, "physical prowess and strength" and "sheer force of will," and in such imbalance with respect to *brahma* lies ruin. Mehta argues that only "the two in perfect harmony and under the guidance of Krishna constitute the fullness of perfection attainable by man" (DV 270). Consequently, "the gods and the *gandharvas* were ordered to take birth on earth as humans… so that, as *kshattriyas*, they may completely destroy each other in the eighteen-day sacrifice that eventually took place" (DV 260). Of importance here is the inevitable destruction of the *kṣatriyas*. This is precisely the stage of Duryodhana's "*nihilistic* narcissism": "Duryodhana… will bring about the total ruin of *kshattra*" (DV 261).

Duryodhana, the nihilistically narcissistic self, sheer will to power, leads all to their deaths through his intoxication with his one-sided pursuit of *artha*. In effect, the *brahman* is anxious for he alone is cognizant of the dynamic movement of time, of death, and ultimately of Rudra/Śiva. Recognizing the motivations that lie in the structure of *kṣattra*, "the guardian of earthly welfare, the true cause of the time of a people," Mehta significantly supplements this centrality with the following: "the ability to see life from a perspective that transcends the good of worldly living enhances the very meaningfulness of such living, [this] is the final message of the epic and the guiding thread of the narrative" (DV 257). The structure of complex temporality and consequently mortality thus play resounding roles in the narrative: "At the terminal point of the finite span of our time, Time itself takes on a character that annuls the preserving force and turns into the energy of death and dissolution, mythically named Rudra or Shiva" (DV 264). Recalling the myth of Dakṣa's sacrifice, Mehta argues that though Śiva/Time/Death does not take part in the ritual sacrifice, he nevertheless "takes a hand in structuring the plot of the narrative." "As with death itself, Rudra's shadowy presence haunts the realm of the living; absent in person, Shiva is present" (DV 264). How is it that death/time is present as absent? Moreover, what is the relationship between Dakṣa's ritual and Śiva?

Dakṣa does not invite Śiva to his ritual sacrifice. Dakṣa denies Śiva. Structurally speaking, this entails that ritual denies death (Flood 1996). Considered in this light, ritual behavior is behavior intended to disperse the dispersing nature of Śiva/time/death.[34] The orgiastic immediacy of earthly goods in the moments succeeding the *rājasūya* sacrifice/ritual excludes Nārada's anxiety, that is, the "relentless approaching of what must be"; otherwise, Nārada's anticipation of death would not tinge the ritual celebration. Death structures the ritual/narrative from without, for without death, ritual need not be. That is to say, the compunction to repeat would be dashed if it were not for the outstanding, yet *destined*, encounter with Śiva. Doniger notes in this regard that "fear of death is replaced by fear of ritual error."[35] If fear of ritual error replaces fear of death, then ritual done correctly thwarts death. Śiva is present as that which is made absent by ritual repetition.

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[34] Norman O. Brown notes in this regard, "Archaic man experiences guilt, and therefore time; that is why he makes such elaborate efforts, once a year, to *deny* it" (1959: 278; emphasis added).

[35] Doniger O'Flaherty credits Jan Heesterman with this recognition. I should note that while I reference "Doniger," all of these references in the reference list will continue to use her former, married name of 'O'Flaherty. (1980: 134).

But what does "non-violence" have to do with Śiva/death and sacrifice? Mehta interprets non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) as acquiescing to that which lies beyond man's/Arjuna's mortal, and thus finite, condition. I thus propose that for Mehta non-violence is in effect violence against the active and violent "sheer will to power." We can of course recall here that the pilgrim's encounter with his own death "fills up a lack." If Indra's violence is the negation of the negation, an attempted affirmation of self, then non-violence must be the negation of the negation of the negation. Mehta, recounting the final scenes of the great battle, speaks of Aśvatthama and his weapon, the *paramāśtra* ("ultimate weapon"), a weapon of all-destroying power, i.e., death itself. Aśvatthama hurls his weapon in final desperation and anger, but Kṛṣṇa, in his turn, instructs his army to throw away their weapons and not to fight against the weapon, upon doing which the weapon loses its force. "In the very midst of the discourse of violence," writes Mehta, "what more eloquent testimony could there be to the power of non-resistance, or nonviolent resistance" (DV 270). Significantly, such non-violence wins the battle for Kṛṣṇa's army. Thus the "battle of life" is won through acquiescence to the "relentlessness of that which must be," i.e., the inevitability of the end time, death. Saying no to the Duryodhanic will-to-power's "no" conquers the enemy within. In fighting against fighting against the other/alterity/death, man establishes an authentic existence grounded in non-violence and compassion. Non-violence begins with the foregoing of the quest for the plenitude of being.

There are two types of death in Mehta's work on the *Mahābhārata*. The first type is the death incumbent upon the one who violently denies its other. This is Duryodhana's death. The property/propriety of the *causa sui* self, of the *kṣattra*, is, according to Kṛṣṇa, the "two-lettered death." This is precisely the nihilistically narcissistic self (the self significantly tied to the genitive, a topic we will revisit in the next chapter). Mehta quotes Kṛṣṇa in the epic addressing Yudhiṣṭhira's enemy within, "'*mama*' (mine) is the two-lettered death, '*na mama*' (not mine) is the three-lettered eternal *brahma*, both of which are within us, impelling us to fight" (DV 270-271). Here the epic war explicitly inverts the Vedic war, that is, Indra's war. Denying self-possession, completion and closure, in essence total propriety and sovereignty (i.e., Indra's rim), *brahma* is that which sacrifices (i.e., the second type of death) the pleasures of earthly glories (*artha*) for the non-knowledge of the secret. Instead of Indra overcoming radical alterity, the battle now takes place between the aggrandizing and *causa sui* self and its recognition of its own structural limitations. "'*Na mama*'… is part of the central formula in all sacrificial offering," Mehta writes (DV 271). Indeed, "from Rigvedic times creation itself and all living, divine or human, is conceived as a sacrifice" (DV 262). It is significant that Mehta speaks of the 18-day sacrifice of the *kṣattriyas*: sacrifice is the destruction of *mama*. Sacrifice is the delegation of authority and propriety to the other, inverting Indra's aggressive project, not to mention the Enlightenment's "*sapere aude*."[36]

[36] Note that this resonates directly with Taylor's sense of sacrifice: "The death of this subject [i.e., the all-knowing, constructive subject] is the sacrifice forever occurring at the altar of the temple that always remains suspended above the cleavage opened by the work of art" (1987: 58).

The acceptance of the repellent Vṛtra is inversely proportional to the denial of the violently self-assertive Duryodhana. Non-violence perpetrates violence against the violent "sheer will to power."

The epic, providing the transition from Mehta's "old order" to the "new," is thus rooted in the mutual reciprocity established between the humans and the gods, immanence and transcendence, self and other. "The epic's preoccupation with *Daiva*, what is ordained by the gods or destiny, and *Purushakara* or human effort, the twin determining factors in all human endeavor has to be kept in mind" (DV 258). Like Heidegger's Dasein, and Gadamer's self, human endeavor must proceed without complete knowledge. Yet, the epic significantly maintains a visibility of the god(s) representative of that which lies beyond the subject's intention and effort. Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa dialogue face-to-face on the battlefield of life. We cannot but notice a certain economy here, a certain *masculine* economy to be precise, that is, an economy between a male warrior/friend and a male god/friend. Kṛṣṇa indeed answers Arjuna's questions. Kṛṣṇa dispenses his *niti*. To this extent, I propose that Mehta's "inner logic" that is "uniquely Indian" (IM 23) is not quite complete, a completion to be discerned in the devoted, and thus truly sacrificial, self of the "new" order of *bhakti*.

## 5.4 The New Order: The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the Devoted Self

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, for Mehta, constitutes the third installment in his Hindu logic. It is here that we see the culmination of his theory of sacrifice. In much the same way he treats his other texts, Mehta does not present an exhaustive interpretation, rather he limits his investigation of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to the tenth canto, and from there even further to the episode of Uddhava and the *gopīs*. Though severely excising the majority of the text, Mehta's reflections on this short segment nevertheless provide suggestive insights into his interpretation of the narrative, as well as his Hindu logic.

A self-proclaimed "philosophical perspective," Mehta admits that his approach may seem a bit "spoil sportish," that is, to treat the topic of *bhakti*, or devotion, from a philosophical position. Mehta's "philosophical perspective," nevertheless, is phenomenological, and thus he refrains from a reduction of *bhakti* to some other principle or ground in favor of describing the structure of *bhakti* itself.[37] I propose that we see here in the structure of *bhakti* Mehta's *homo religiosus* characterized by a triple sacrifice of the constructive subject, the friendly god, and the economy of mutuality. It would indeed appear that for Mehta the truly religious self, the sacrificial

[37] Of course, the irony of Mehta's phenomenological interpretation of *bhakti* is that it ultimately contests the metaphysics of presence often associated with phenomenology. See below.

self emerges only in the face of the "*deus absconditus* or *otiosus*" of the *bhakti* tradition. Ironically as well as significantly, in the moment of utmost devotion to the god, to the other, we in fact see the god/other withdraw. It is only through this structural absence of the god/other that the structure of sacrifice comes to "completion." Significantly, sacrificial devotion is represented in the text by the *feminine* trope of the *gopīs*. Thus the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* completes the sacrificial logic emerging throughout Mehta's chosen texts through the trope of women and their particular aneconomy, that is, their "devoted selves."

Mehta sets up his interpretation of *bhakti* by recounting the scene from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* where Uddhava approaches the *gopīs* bereft of their beloved Kṛṣṇa in order "to make the love-lorn *gopīs see reason*" (B 204; emphasis added).[38] Recognizing his debts to the written tradition, Mehta significantly supplements the "official text" by incorporating a "popular story, narrated with much gusto by our Hindi poets, of the sixteenth century and dramatized often in the Krishna *lilas* even today" (B 204). He relates from the "popular story" how the *gopīs* lambaste Uddhava for talking "high philosophy" and "preaching yoga." Understanding that in the text proper the *gopīs* "lap up even the bit of philosophy contained in the message conveyed by Uddhava," Mehta includes the popular account for it depicts what he takes to be the central element of *bhakti*. Though Kṛṣṇa speaks through Uddhava's message testifying that he is never truly parted from the *gopīs* [a most familiar theme in the long tradition of Vaiṣṇava theology], Mehta questions the exact nature of this "non-separation."

Concerning Uddhava's learned message, Mehta notes, "This message does not have the slightest effect on the *gopīs* for they continue responding in love's language, utterly absorbed in their beloved parted from them, who is yet with them in the *mode of absence, as a trace of his presence*" (B 204-205; emphasis added). The abstract philosophical doctrine of Kṛṣṇa's universal being and yoga makes no inroads with the *gopīs*. Significantly, the knowledge of his Being does not quell the suffering love the *gopīs* have for Kṛṣṇa. But perhaps what is most important is Mehta's characterization of Kṛṣṇa's "non-separation": Kṛṣṇa *is* with the *gopīs as absence, as trace*. Borrowing language popularized by Jacques Derrida's deconstructive philosophy, Mehta in effect suggests that Kṛṣṇa *is* present *as* absent. Precisely in this way, Kṛṣṇa's absence interrupts the self's phenomenological horizon. Recall from Mehta's interpretation of the *Ṛgveda*: "May we not lose sight of the *trace* of the bird in flight." In both instances, one at the origin of the tradition, the other well over two millennia later, the theme of the holy that is present as absent surfaces for Mehta. Yet with the "old order," the Vedic *ṛṣis feared* losing sight of the trace. Now in the "new" order, fear is significantly replaced with devout longing and love. Mehta tacitly introduces here a principal theme in Indian aesthetics, that is,

[38] We can of course recall here our discussion from Chap. 4 concerning vision and the philosophical project. For Mehta, vision is the sense of initiation: vision most closely resonates with the intentions of the observer, and to this extent places the initiation and agency with the subject. This will become important in what follows.

*viraha bhakti*. Signifying "love-in-separation," *viraha bhakti* represents a love for the one that is absent, a love understood to be stronger than that of love for the one *present* and *visible*. The *gopīs* devoutly love Kṛṣṇa, but their love is significantly most perfect in his absence. Kṛṣṇa's withdrawal, to be sure, rends the *gopis'* hearts; but this is all done for the sake of love. Friedhelm Hardy notes in this regard, "[H]is (i.e., Krishna's) motives for concealing himself and causing the *gopīs* to undergo the suffering and separation are… elusive… [I]t can be regarded… as done for the sake of letting love and devotion grow" (1983: 536).

I propose that we see here a significant shift in both economy and gender. The predominance of the masculine economy between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in the *Mahābhārata* (itself a remnant of the contractual relationships in the Veda) is displaced by a feminine aneconomy, a relation without mutuality and reciprocity. That is to say, the *gopīs* are lovingly related to a present absence, a trace. As Mehta's texts have been repeatedly concerned with the relationship obtaining between man and god, man and man, self and other, we now read in no uncertain terms that the *gopīs*, who are *separated* from the *withdrawn* Kṛṣṇa, are in fact in "the ultimately valid relationship with God" (B 205). The ultimately valid relationship with God (with the other) is significantly a relationship to the one who withdraws; or, the ultimately valid relationship is with the one who interrupts the intentional horizon, that is, to the one who *fails to reciprocate*.[39] The ultimately valid relationship is thus thoroughly aneconomical. In this way, Mehta suggests an aporia in our understanding of "relationship." That is to say, true relationship requires self and other, but this other must remain *as* other in order to remain parted from the self, maintaining thereby the separation essential to relationship. Post-structurally speaking, the self can only be related to what refuses relation.

Explicitly indicating the gendered structure of this "ultimately valid relationship," Mehta quotes Kṛṣṇa thusly, "It is woman's nature that inwardly they are more taken up by the beloved who is far away than when he is near them and *visible* to them" (B 204). I propose that Mehta completes here the transition subtly introduced in his work on the epic. In his work on the epic he notes in passing that the friendship between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, a friendship whose initiation is the responsibility of Kṛṣṇa, is not the same as that between Draupadī and Kṛṣṇa. "A slight difference in the nuance of this relationship," Mehta suggests, "is that in Arjuna's case it is Krishna who claims him for a friend while in Draupadī's it is she who speaks of being Krishna's dear friend" (K 125). Draupadī, the *woman*, witnesses to the existence of the absent friend, and thus for Mehta, "the other." The woman needs not the presence of the other in order to reach out to this other. Arjuna, enmired in facticity, on the other hand, fails to reach out to Kṛṣṇa, who consequently must show up and offer assistance.

Though Mehta's texts fail to articulate this point explicitly, I believe that what we have here is a repetition of the Vedic relationship to the transcendent other with a significant new twist. Herein rests the thread that runs throughout Mehta's Hindu

[39] Here we see Mehta offering an alternative myth model to the ones taken with reciprocity and empathic we-selves.

logic. Both the old and new orders of Mehta's logic characterize the relationship between self and other. Yet notice that the *gopīs*, unlike Indra and his thwarted self, do not violently assault the radically other, but rather *love* the other's alterity. The violent overcoming of the other through Indra's masculine heroics has now been fully displaced by a feminine love of the other who withdraws. What was once a threatening other (i.e., the obduracy of the stone) has now become the object of adoration. Moreover, the mutuality and reciprocity of the masculine friendship initiated by Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* is now displaced along with Kṛṣṇa himself. According to Mehta's texts, we have moved from an initial aggressive struggle with the other in the "old order," to a friendly, masculine economy where self and other are visible to one another, to a loving, invisible, sacrificial, and excessive feminine aneconomy of the "new" order. Mehta, recall, specifically argues that the Vedas point to "*a contractual relationship* between truth and the gods, between gods and men" (HT 113; emphasis added). He also spoke of a pact being sealed between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. A contract, a pact, an economic relationship is *precisely* what the *gopīs* do *not* share with Kṛṣṇa. I propose that for Mehta the *gopī* structurally represents the devoted self who embraces the alterity of the other, an alterity that precludes simple identity and economy. The *gopīs* are the subjects of sacrifice.[40]

It is also important to recognize here the gratuity of feminine sacrifice. That is to say, the intentional longings and love of the *gopīs* go unrequited. The presence of Kṛṣṇa that would apparently entail the fullness of being is formally precluded in the structure of *viraha bhakti*. Precisely to this extent, Arjuna's/Nara's "striving to attain fullness of being" is just that – a striving. The beloved is not present in order to complete the circuit of exchange, a completion that would in effect nullify the sacrifice. In this way, the *gopīs'* sacrificial love for Kṛṣṇa, the withdrawn other, is indeed gratuitous, that is to say, it is *prema* ("divine love") and not *kāma* ("carnal love"); or, and borrowing terms from the Western tradition, it is *agapé* rather than *eros*.[41] Hardy observes, "It is this fire of separation which burns up all the impurities of *kāma*" (1983: 536). The other is not present in order to reciprocate with love. Yet the *gopīs*, unlike Indra, are not threatened by such non-reciprocity. In Kṛṣṇa's formal transcendence, his present absence, the *gopīs* (though suffering) despair not, but love with utter devotion.[42] The devoted self, the *bhakta*, recognizes what always and already stands outside of her proprietary command, and instead of bemoaning this fact, celebrates it. I thus propose that for Mehta the *gopīs* tropically mark the central formula in all sacrifice, that is, *na mama*.

[40] "At the limit," Jill Robbins argues, "sacrifice *must* be aneconomic, gratuitous, indeed excessive" (Robbins 1998: 289).

[41] In this regard, Taylor notes, "While erotic love… presupposes an economic relation that is *mutually* beneficial and thus thoroughly sensible, agape is a nonreciprocal nonrelation that eludes every economy and thus is senseless. Agape… leaves the gap eros ceaselessly longs to fill" (1999: 44).

[42] Levinas comments, "Transcendence would no longer be a failed immanence…. A sociality which, in opposition to all knowledge and all immanence, is a *relation with the other as such* and not with the other as a pure part of the world" (1996: 158).

At this point Mehta directs our attention away from the explicit protagonists, i.e., the *gopīs*, and towards the figure of Uddhava. We see that the story Mehta is telling ultimately centers on this figure, for it is Uddhava who actually undergoes development in the narrative. Recall, "He [Uddhava] carries a message from Krishna to the *gopis*, which does not go home" (B 205). Uddhava's message, expounding the "Kṛṣṇological" discourse of totality and universality, does not go home; it finds no recipient. That the message does not go home is in fact the "moral" of the story. Mehta writes, "The realization that his message cannot go home, is the real message here, which Uddhava himself gets from the *gopis*" (B 205). Significantly, the intended channel of communication and teaching is reversed. Masculine philosophy, and its initiatory quest, teaches not feminine love but rather is the pupil at love's feet. "No more a messenger, he [Uddhava] becomes himself the *recipient* of a truth," writes Mehta, "hidden from him until now, even though he lived in close physical proximity to Krishna and knew intellectually all about his supreme divinity and the universality of his being the true object of ultimate concern" (B 205). Mehta suggests here that Uddhava remained blind to a truth even when he "lived in close physical proximity to Krishna." In other words, the full disclosure of universal being still harbors an undisclosed truth. Plenitude hides within itself a truth that only the devoted self seems to understand. The *gopīs*, unlike Arjuna in the epic, need neither Uddhava's message nor Kṛṣṇa's presence. Regardless of his possession of "universal knowledge," Uddhava comes to realize that the loving relationship, or should we not say, the "loving non-relationship," overcomes complete knowledge, as well as complete economy.[43]

The sacrifice at the heart of Mehta's Hindu logic thus depends upon the *withdrawal* of Kṛṣṇa. If Kṛṣṇa were to return to Vrindaban, then ultimately the "*na mama*" of sacrifice would revert to the "*mama*" of death; the economic pact would be sealed. Kṛṣṇa's withdrawal thus keeps the sacrificial space open through which novelty and contingency, play and dance emerge. The narrative speaks to the confrontation between the self-possession of total knowledge and that which forever eludes knowledge.

[43] Mehta tells a story about Uddhava setting out on a journey to impart knowledge to the other, but finds that on his journey, on his *pilgrimage*, he becomes the recipient of a message of love, and not philosophy and yoga. The embrace of absence displaces universal being. Note that here, and stylistically speaking (contrasting the stylistics of the *Mahābhārata*), Uddhava is a single being in possession of the single truth. He subsequently comes upon a multiplicity of *gopīs*, women. Uddhava is the *one muni* that approaches the *many gopīs/bhaktas*. If Uddhava is a single person with the single knowledge, the *gopīs* by contrast are numerous and in "possession" of *ecstatic* love. Thus Uddhava stylistically represents, I suggest, the monadology that is philosophy, while the *gopīs* stylistically represent the "devoted self/lacerated consciousness" and the ecstasy of the loving relationship with the withdrawn god, the radical other. Uddhava is drawn out of his solitude through this ecstatic love for the absent Kṛṣṇa. Phenomenologically speaking, the *gopīs* signify the decentered nature of the one open to the other, an other that presence-s *as* absent, and as such represents a futurity that never arrives, an interminable delay that structures not only sacrifice, but freedom as well. The future never arrives and as such the "open realm of possibilities" remains open. To this extent, the self does not consolidate itself in total propriety, but rather accepts its own incompletion, its *na mama*.

> Whatever is communicable from one to another, like a message, or teachable, like a theory or doctrine, is within the grasp of the intellect and its way of relating man to the ultimate, through understanding and insight. This we see here *shattering to bits* when confronted with the actuality of the *gopis'* at-one-ment with Krishna in love, *in separation even more fully so* than when he was in their midst as a physical presence. (B 205; emphasis added)

Not only do we see doctrines and theories, that is, the pilgrim's idols shattered to bits, but, and significantly, we also see economy itself shatter to bits in the name of separation. The circle of exchange is exchanged in a sacrifice, itself the embodiment of excessive behavior, the fruits of which are forever delayed.

Yet all of this is not meant as an indictment of the intellect and/or reason *tout court*. To the contrary, it is significant that Uddhava compasses the highest knowledge as imparted to him by Kṛṣṇa in order to go and teach others. But the particular others whom he approaches have no need for such single-minded philosophy. The tension between the two "spheres" will, and must, continue according to Mehta. "The dialectical movement between thinking, as finite man's attempt to touch the Absolute," Mehta posits, "and the ecstasy of love for the supreme as Person continuously goes on and one must find ever new ways of putting this in words" (B 205-206). Though we will return to this in the next chapter, notice for now that Mehta suggests here a repetition of the epic concern for a balance between *kṣattra* and *brahma*.

At this point we must ask, with Mehta, "the central theoretical question of that with which *bhakti* brings man in touch?" (B 206) Here Mehta pursues the identity of that to which the devoted self is devoted, repeating in a curious way the famous Augustinian query of what/who does one love when one loves one's god? Tracing the characterization of *bhakti* through various texts in the Vaiṣṇava tradition, Mehta writes, "If in the *Gita*, *bhakti* is not defined but only proclaimed… and in the *Vishnupurana* presented before us as an exemplar typifying ideal *bhakti* in the person of Prahlada, the *Bhagavata* offers an elaborate doctrine of the love of God" (B 209). Mehta goes on to suggest that it is the "ancient Upanisadic doctrine of *rasa*, which sustains both the aesthetics and the metaphysics of the *bhakti* tradition as it subsequently developed" (B 209). *Rasa*, connoting an ontological affect, an attunement, here takes the form of "wonder."[44]

Mehta suggests that the repetitive use of the phrase "O, wonder of wonders" indicates an "enveloping sense of a marvel taking place" (B 209). Of importance here is to notice that "o, wonder of wonders" signifies precisely that which exceeds

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[44] Though I did not discuss this in Chap. 3, for Heidegger Dasein is not only always already thrown into the world, but this thrownness is always accompanied by a particular mood. Dasein is never affectively indifferent. Heidegger writes, "The mood brings Dasein before the 'that-it-is' of its 'there'…. [O]ntologically mood is a primordial kind of Being for Dasein, in which Dasein is disclosed to itself *prior to* all cognition and volition, and *beyond* their range of disclosure" (BT 175). Here, I argue, Mehta is employing *rasa* in much the same way as Heidegger deploys his "mood." In other words, Mehta is arguing that there is a state of being of Dasein that is peculiar to the tradition of *bhakti*, and that this mood discloses, before all philosophy and yoga, an irreducible structure of man, the structure of *homo religiosus*.

the subject's conceptual capacity, that which exceeds and, consequently, *surprises* the self. Classically, and according to the *Nāṭya Śāstra*, there are eight *rasas*. The *Śāstra* states: "In the dramatic arts there are eight *rasas*: erotic sentiment, humor, compassion, anger/wrath, heroism, terror, disgust and surprise (*adbhuta*)" (*Nāṭya Śāstra* 6.15).[45] The *Nāṭya Śāstra* also states that all eight *rasas* are ultimately related to their own particular *sthāyibhāva*, or 'enduring sentiments.' *Nāṭya Śāstra* 6.17: "The enduring emotions (*sthāyibhāva*) are named – joy, mirth, grief, anger, desire, fear, disgust and wonder/astonishment (*vismaya*)." Of significance here is that the *sthāyibhāva* associated with "surprise/*adbhuta*" is "wonder/*vismaya*." This is significant for Mehta's reading of *bhakti*.

*Vismaya*, etymologically considered, is from the root *smi* ('to be proud or arrogant') with the added prefix *vi* ('apart, asunder'). Accordingly, *vismaya* can equally be read as "wonder" or "free from pride or arrogance." In fact, while the Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary recognizes the *sthāyibhāva* of *vismaya* in the *Nāṭya Śāstra* as "wonder," it specifically locates the latter meaning with that found in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Thus the *rasa* most related to Mehta's interpretation of *bhakti*, *vismaya*, denotes "free from arrogance." Now, when taken in conjunction with *adbhuta*/surprise, we see that the *gopīs* indeed embody the (non)essence of *na mama*. The sacrificial formula, for Mehta, points directly to the sacrifice of the arrogance so manifested by Duryodhana's *mama*. *Vismaya* is the enduring mood that betrays the self's structural openness to that which exceeds/surprises it. Mehta comments upon the narrative of Prahlāda in order to draw out the consequences of the *rasa* of *vismaya*: "Prahlada *was not* himself *the initiating centre* from which the movement of relating himself to God flowed" (B 209; emphasis added). Thus, at the root of the *rasa* of "o, wonder of wonders," the *rasa* particularly suited for *bhakti* (the only valid relationship to the other), is the sacrifice of initiative, of agency. Prahlāda "was, rather, as the *Bhagavata* puts it, caught fast in his very self by the grip of the Lord's grace" (B 209-210).

Here we see Mehta's view of the "essence" of *bhakti* (and by a certain extension, religion) as opposed to philosophy. "Letting oneself be caught in such a grip by the Invisible, and by the invisible truth of what is visible, and loving the enchantment that befalls us is of the *very essence of bhakti*, *as against all spiritual striving in which man takes all initiative upon himself*" (B 210, emphases added). Disclosing the deep passivity/receptivity of rent subjectivity, Mehta's devoted self responds to the structural absence of the other (i.e., "the invisible truth of what is visible"), a *transcendental* absence that forever keeps open the space of divine love and play. Mark C. Taylor notes in this regard, "The gap that splits the subject is the tear that creates an opening for the play of passion. Never merely erotic, the passion of subjectivity is a passivity that knows not depth." (1999: 46, emphasis added). Is it not telling that both Kṛṣṇa's and the *gopīs'* deeds are linked to the former's divine play? "Kṛṣṇa's deeds," Hardy proposes, "are styled *līlā* or *krīḍā* 'game, sport, playful but

[45] Here and below I use my own translations.

purposeless action'…. This purposeless play into which the *gopīs* throw themselves strikes at the root of normative values, of *dharma*" (1983: 537). I argue that the purposeless play of the *gopīs* resonates with the *Gelassenheit* Mehta refers to in his discussion of a hermeneutic of a "global we." The withdrawal of Kṛṣṇa is that "great loss" that alone can bring legatees of disparate cultural traditions together. After all, the essence of *bhakti* is to be without essence, which is to say, to be purposelessly playful.[46]

Thus completing the tropic progression from the thwarted self of Indra, to the nihilistically narcissistic self of Duryodhana, and the dissymmetrical mutuality of the economical friendship between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, the *gopī* (the devoted self) is the ideal representative of *bhakti*. As its etymology implies, the *bhakta* is divided (Skt. *bhaj* – to divide), that is, internally incomplete. To be sure, the same root can be translated as "to share," but, and again, the point is that separation is logically prior to sharing. If sharing and devotional relationship are the explicit interests of the *gopī*, then I suggest that the unstated, yet primary concern is one of maintaining separation. "Here and henceforth, the archetype, symbol and paradigm of the human relationship to the Divine, or *bhakti*," Mehta posits, "is the *gopī*" (B 210). The *gopī*, the *bhakta*, is forever bereft of the plenitude of being, thus enabling the ecstatic love so central to the *bhakti* traditions. To be sure, Kṛṣṇa does not even reciprocate with love for those who love him most dearly. Hardy quotes Kṛṣṇa:

> Friends! I do not love even the people who love me, so that their attachment may continue, just as a poor man, when all his wealth has perished, thinks of it so intently that he knows nothing else. In the same way I have concealed myself… for the sake of your devotion to me. (1983: 536)

Undeniably, it is this aneconomy, this radically asymmetrical (non)relationship that the *gopīs* enjoy. Hardy in fact cites the *gopīs* precisely in this regard: "Friendship with others is solely for the sake of one's own profit; it will be pretended only so long as the profit lasts… Prostitutes abandon the man whose wealth is exhausted" (1983: 536). Here in no uncertain terms we see exactly what we have been discussing thus far: *bhakti* displaces friendly economy. The *gopīs* devoutly consent to Kṛṣṇa's structural absence and thus their own incompletion in their uncompromising commitment to love.[47]

Mehta's *bhakta* thus foregoes its arrogant initiative; the *bhakta* is *vismaya*. This entails that the *rasa* of "o' wonder of wonders" is a pure response. Accordingly, Mehta contends that *bhakti* "implies the generation of a wholeness in our total being

[46] I believe Mehta's *gopīs* thus resonate with Taylor's "delight": "Delight replaces self-affirmation, which attempts to negate negation by negating otherness, with an affirmation of negation that is impossible apart from the acceptance of the other. Instead of struggling to reduce difference to identity, the one who delights acknowledges the identity of difference and appreciates the difference of identity" (1984: 147).

[47] Taylor notes in this regard, "The desiring subject discovers an other within that forever disrupts the calm of simple self-identity. By refusing to transform desire into need, the subject consents to its own incompletion" (1984: 147).

and as such is a *total response* to the reality disclosed by the experience of *rasa*" (B 213). The self's wholeness, like the pilgrim's "wholeness," paradoxically implies a lack. If the self's total being depends upon a total response to the "wonder of wonders," then that to which the self responds structurally lies beyond it. The wholeness of the self's total being paradoxically relies upon the structural absence of the other to whom he responds. The self's wholeness is in this way its recognition of incompletion. The *gopī* is the pilgrim. The *gopīs'* total being rests in the fact that that which is closest to their hearts is precisely what is absent. Mehta writes, "*bhakti* represents man's primordial relationship to Being… the supreme privilege of man's *mortal* estate and the ultimate refuge in his search for wholeness and for being healed" (B 214; emphasis added). I thus propose that for Mehta's *svadhā* the *gopīs supplant both Indra and Duryodhana*. Indra's need was to overcome the other. Indra, by overcoming the other, set himself up as "sovereign." This "sovereignty" then carried over to Duryodhana. Duryodhana's need was to impose his will. The *gopī*, in contrast to both, does not fear the outstanding other, and consequently, recognizes a structural lack that forever precludes its initiative and will-to-power.

Before proceeding to the conclusion of the present chapter, I want to note briefly that Mehta, willingly or not, corrects his own characterization of the relationship to the other. Recall, Mehta suggested that the self's relationship to the other always involves a questioning attitude: "We never stop asking this question till the end of our mortal days, about the 'who' and about the relationship that binds us to another" (K 124). I contend that Mehta's "new" order introduces precisely the opposite. The *gopī* that is the "paradigm of the relationship to the Divine" (and, I would add, the other) significantly does *not* ask questions. In other words, the loving spirit of the *gopī* now tempers Mehta's questing spirit that at one point appeared to be universal. The *gopī* has no use for questions, because questioning the other is motivated by a need to reduce the surprise and wonder of the other to something more manageable. In this way, the *gopī* is not the philosopher who quests: "The primary difference between the poet and the philosopher is that the poet speaks, the philosopher asks questions" (PP 251). Indeed, the *gopī* loves the other and its alterity, willing to forego the initiative of its own needs and concepts.[48] The relation to the other, to the Divine in the new order integrated by *bhakti*, eschews precisely the questioning spirit in favor of loving the alterity that forever eludes the self's initiative.

From the *Ṛgveda*, to the *Mahābhārata*, to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Mehta's logic running throughout the Hindu tradition ultimately concerns the self who responds to that which structurally exceeds its initiative and, in such excess, calls it out of its immersion in immediacy. The Hindu tradition's logic of love, a sacrificial logic to be sure, is most fully represented for Mehta by the trope of the *gopī*. Uddhava, for his part, exemplifies the mortal condition of possessing the knowledge of putative totality and plenitude that must ultimately be displaced by the manifest love for that which remains structurally absent and invisible. To this extent, Uddhava tropically

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[48] Levinas similarly argues, "The other to whom the petition of the question is addressed does not belong to the intelligible sphere to be explored" (1998: 25).

marks the structure of the pilgrim/the devoted self who comes to realize the *rasa* of wonder and surprise, the state of devotion, of *bhakti*. Uddhava, like the pilgrim, allows the other's lesson (and here a lesson of *unquestioning* devotion to the withdrawn other) to hit home. Uddhava's totalizing philosophy and yoga are structurally displaced. Mehta's Hindu logic thus points to the withdrawal of the god as well as to the structural preclusion of the plenitude of being. Delighted equanimity with incompletion is the postmetaphysical lesson Mehta draws from his Hindu tradition. All of that being said, the final task for the present project will be to examine how Mehta's model of the Hindu Pilgrim not only dialogues with other models representing the relationship between self and other in late twentieth century philosophy and religious thought, but also the significant displacements this model effects with regard to the Hindu tradition itself.

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# Chapter 6
# Greek Heroes, Jewish Nomads, and Hindu Pilgrims: Ulysses, Abraham and Uddhava at the Cross-Cultural-Roads

## 6.1 Introduction

Up to this point, we have discussed Mehta's biography, his Heideggerian and Gadamerian influences, his critique of the cross-cultural encounter with respect to his model of the pilgrim, and lastly, his postmetaphysical interpretation of the Hindu tradition. In this chapter, we will examine Mehta's contributions to the dialogical engagement of contemporary Continental philosophical and Indian intellectual traditions. To accomplish this task, I first draw our attention to, *faute de mieux*, contemporary Continental philosophy of religion. I address in particular the role of what I call "ethnotropes" in the work of Emanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, John D. Caputo, and Mark C. Taylor. For these authors, Ulysses (the Greek Hero) and Abraham (the Jewish Nomad) serve as tropic substitutes for the transcendental subject and the deconstructive subject respectively. I will characterize in detail these types in order to lay the groundwork for a comparison with Mehta's ethnotrope, that is, his "Hindu Pilgrim."

I submit that Mehta's reading of the Pilgrim and *viraha bhakti* ('love-in-separation') presents a significant alternative to the formal structures of the Hero and Nomad. In fact, and as I will show, the Hero and Nomad (though intended to oppose each other on this very point) are both committed to the ontophenomenological horizon, a horizon intimately associated, as we have seen, with the Western philosophical tradition generally conceived.[1] To be precise, the Greek Hero ethnotropically substitutes for Edmund Husserl's transcendental subject. Insofar as transcendental subjectivity entails, in effect, transcendental idealism, it precludes the possibility of alterity. The Jewish Nomad, on the other hand, substitutes for that subject for whom the other is yet *to come* to presence. This emphasis on the "to come" reflects the messianic turn in recent deconstructive philosophy. The messianic is intended to delimit the efficacy of transcendental intentions by suggesting an otherness that is

[1] On the "ontophenomenological," see Derrida (1997): 6.

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not yet present. Although intended as an ethical corrective to the transcendental subject's reduction of alterity, I argue, all the same, that the so-called messianic retains a commitment to the metaphysics of presence and thus fails to complete the ethical critique. This subtle commitment becomes pronounced when placed in a dialogical framework with what appears to be the negative messianic intention animating Mehta's Hindu Pilgrim and its relation-without-relation to the *withdrawn* other. Indeed, in this chapter we will discern three distinct understandings of the other in contemporary Continental and Indian traditions: (1) the other that is already present for investigation and ultimately colonization, (2) the other that is on its way to presence, and (3) the other that is not only not coming, but is in fact withdrawing. While the messianic indeed appears to be the privileged ethnotrope associated with Franco-American deconstruction, I show how even the Continental authors themselves slip back and forth between the latter two possibilities. To be sure, and significantly for our discussion, the second possibility is associated with the privileged messianic, but the third possibility is associated with friendship. Messiahs are not friends. Greek Heroes and Jewish Nomads are not Hindu Pilgrims.

Having examined this cross-cultural dialogue, I turn next to a consideration of the impact of Mehta's thought on Hinduism itself. I specifically address which of the classical Hindu traditions are most challenged by Mehta's position. To be precise, I propose that Mehta's work adumbrates a critique of Advaita Vedānta's *fusion* (not to mention all traditions that are morphologically similar) in lieu of an opening for the *separation* of the *bhakta*. Though Mehta at times proffers seemingly conflicting statements regarding his appreciation, or not, for the fusion and identity-oriented Vedānta, I propose that his postmetaphysical philosophy of Hindu religion seemingly culminates with an emphasis on separation, a separation transcendentally preclusive of Advaita Vedānta's monistic ontology.[2] Mehta's "ontology" expresses what I have been calling his postcolonial hermeneutics.

I conclude this final chapter with a brief consideration of the convergence between Mehta and Levinas. For both authors, the trope of woman represents the ethical subject for whom a deep passivity formally antecedes the adventure of reason. Insofar as the Continental tradition associates language with the house of Being, we will see that the masculine and the feminine are associated with disparate

[2] On this point, some caution is warranted. I am, indeed, unsure if Mehta himself recognized this possible reading of his work. Of course, from one hermeneutical standpoint, this point may be irrelevant; after all, any one author tends to admit to several interpretations. That being said, I believe Mehta's work on Heidegger, Gadamer, and Derrida encourages one particular reading over another. To be sure, Mehta's sustained critique of the metaphysics of presence cannot ultimately endorse the Advaita Vedānta's ontology, itself a preeminent example of not only the metaphysics of presence, but also ontotheology. Mehta's work on *bhakti* and the friend – as I discuss below – is logically incompatible with the Advaita Vedānta. Appeals to Indian sensibilities concerning the ability to think the both/and as opposed to the either/or simply miss the mark here. As mentioned in the Introduction, Advaita Vedānta's recognition of *saguṇa brahman* and *nirguṇa brahman* is not a both/and scenario; the former is simply reduced to the latter. Here I submit that Mehta's separated *bhakta* reflects a quasi-transcendental condition and as such cannot co-exist with the radical, monistic idealism of the Advaita Vedānta.

linguistic constructions. As indicated in the last chapter, Mehta's reading of the Hindu tradition entails a significant shift from the masculine trope of heroic conquest to the feminine trope of sacrifice, a shift commonly deployed in the Hindu devotional texts. I thus argue that both Mehta and Levinas advance a certain feminine model for the transcendental subject after deconstruction, that is, a model for a post-deconstructive subjectivity particularly apt for the ethical responsibility facilitative of a genuine encounter with the cultural other.

## 6.2 Greek Heroes and German Idealism

One of the first protracted discussions of Ulysses the Hero in direct contrast to Abraham the Nomad is found in Erich Auerbach's essay (1968), "Odysseus' Scar" (1968: 3–23).[3] There, Auerbach delineates the thematic disparities between the characters found in the Greek epics and those found in the Biblical narratives. The characters in the Greek epics, e.g., Ulysses, evince one very telling trait – the capacity to remain the same through the (ultimately impotent) passage of time. That is to say, the Greek Hero never matures, never becomes. This is the case because the Hero's other poses neither risk nor lesson: the Hero endures the confrontation with his other. This endurance, this maintenance, is tropically marked by a voyage, a journey out to the other with a structurally immanent return: Ulysses follows a circular route. Such circularity putatively guarantees the recuperation of self in homecoming. "Even Odysseus, in whose case the long lapse of time and the many events which occurred offer so much opportunity for biographical development, shows almost nothing of it," notes Auerbach, "Odysseus on his return is exactly the same as he was when he left Ithaca two decades earlier" (1968: 17). Heroic adventures are ultimately accidental occurrences, and as such they fail to affect directly the Hero's putative essence. The Hero travels out to the other only to return home unchanged, or if changed, then most certainly changed for the better: the Hero returns from his adventures abroad with a sack full of loot. But is the Hero's "adventure" truly adventurous?

The tropic significance of the Greek Hero emerges when we recognize it as a substitute for the German philosopher Edmund Husserl's transcendental subject. For Husserl, it would appear that the subject constitutes, and thereby compromises, the being of the transcendent other. This is transcendental idealism. In his indicatively titled, *Cartesian Meditations* (1960), Husserl indeed reduces transcendence to the grounding acts of the ego, that is, the transcendental subject. He writes, "The status of an evidently valid being is one it can acquire *only* from *my* own evidences, *my* grounding acts" (1960: 26). Notice that the grammatical constructions attending transcendental subjectivity turn out to be first person, nominative pronouns ("I"),

[3] While Auerbach uses "Odysseus," I will use in my discussion "Ulysses," establishing thereby continuity with the Continental philosophers addressed in this chapter.

first person genitives (“mine”), and transitive verbs, that is, verbs preserving the initiating agency of the subject. Transcendental phenomenology is in this regard a “solipsistically” reduced “egology,” the egology of the primordially reduced ego, “a phenomenological transcendental idealism… a *monadology*” (Husserl 1960: 155, 150). Husserl writes: “Anything belonging to the world, any spatiotemporal being, exists for me – that is to say, is accepted by me – in that I experience it, perceive it, remember it, think of it somehow, judge about it, value it, desire it, or the like” (1960: 21). By means of reflection, this subject, the Greek Hero, comes to realize that *its* world exists because it first intends this world. Like Auerbach’s Greek Hero returning home unblemished by his encounters with the other, the transcendental subject discovers that it always already organizes its own spectacle.[4] That is to say, the subject discovers that the once provocative other is in fact an effect of its own organizing activities and intentions. Analogy establishes the intelligibility of putative alterity: “the body over there, which is nevertheless apprehended as an animate organism, must have derived this sense by an *apperceptive transfer from my animate organism*… the ‘*analogizing*’ *apprehension* of that body as another animate organism” (Husserl 1960: 130). For Husserlian idealism, the other becomes an instance of a general type, a general type that the self ultimately constitutes through its own self-awareness: “I experience him as *my* Other” (Husserl 1960: 130). Insofar as the other is an instance of a type the self already knows, there are no true others for the transcendental subject. Monadology preserves in this way what we will come to see as an ethically suspect position. Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, the transcendental subject can encounter only itself in the other’s “transcendence.” Transcendental idealism precludes otherness. In this way, the Hero cannot but return home the same. But precisely for this reason, the heroic adventure is no adventure.

Proposing that an adventure necessitates the absolute frustration of transcendental intention, Emanuel Levinas suggests that if the other is constituted by the self, then the other is indeed merely a penultimate moment in the self’s unadventurous return to its autonomy. Levinas writes, “The autonomy of consciousness… finds itself again in all its adventures, returning home to itself like Ulysses, who through

[4] Mark C. Taylor, citing Merleau-Ponty, writes: “In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty elaborates the implications of his criticism of the modern interpretation of subjectivity in an account of what he describes as the ‘the philosophy of reflection.’ By interpreting the subject as ‘thetic,’ i.e., the constitutive source or origin of the world of experience, ‘the philosophy of reflection metamorphoses the effective world into a transcendental field; in doing so it only puts me back at the origin of a spectacle that I could never have had unless, unbeknown to myself, I organized it. It only makes me consciously what I have always been distractedly; it only makes me give its name to a dimension behind myself, a depth whence, in fact, already my vision was formed. Through the reflection, the ‘I’, lost in its perceptions, *rediscovers itself* by rediscovering them as thoughts. It [the ‘I’] thought it had quit itself for them, deployed in them; it comes to realize that if it had quit itself, they would not be and that the very deployment of the distances and the things was only the ‘outside’ of its own inward intimacy with itself, that the unfolding of the world was the enfolding on itself of a thought that thinks anything whatever only because it thinks itself first’” (1987: 64).

all his peregrinations is only on the way to his native land" (1986: 346), "an odyssey where all adventures are only the accidents of a return to self" (1998: 99), and as such, "this adventure is no adventure" (1996: 14). Falsely believing that it quits itself, that is, that it leaves its "Cartesian theater" to investigate the external world, the Hero realizes that anything it encounters must already be an effect of its own thesis. In this regard, the thetic subject, or the constructive subject, is that being for whom all others are *its* others. The reality the thetic subject comes to know is the one constituted by its own subjectivity. Precisely to this extent, alterity for the thetic subject is merely an unrecognized interiority, an "inward intimacy." The thetic subject is thus the apperceptive source of the phenomenal, transcendent world. Husserl notes in this regard:

> "*Transcendence*" is part of the intrinsic sense of anything worldly, *despite* the fact that anything worldly necessarily acquires all the sense determining it, along with its existential status, exclusively from my experiencing, my objectivating, thinking, valuing, or doing, at particular times – notably the status of an evidently valid being is one it can acquire only from my own evidences, my grounding acts. (1960: 26)

"Heroic" phenomenology in effect negates transcendence, thus completing a predominant trajectory in the Western philosophical tradition. "The struggle to refute transcendence in all its guises," Taylor rightly points out, "culminates in the philosophy of the constructive subject developed by Hegel and elaborated by Husserl" (1987: 203). The Greek Hero, the thetic subject, resonates, I propose, with Duryodhana's and Śiśupāla's "no": Husserl's *epoché* affects an impediment against friendly solicitations from the other. Levinas adds, "The detour of ideality leads to coinciding with oneself, that is, to certainty, which remains the guide and guarantee of the whole spiritual adventure of being. But this is why this adventure is no adventure" (1998: 99). The centripetal "detour of ideality" effectively reduces time, accident, and alterity, leading to a certainty that is exhaustive "coinciding with oneself," a "knowledge of the totality." "Intentionality remains an aspiration to be filled and fulfillment, the centripetal movement of a consciousness that coincides with itself, recovers, and rediscovers itself without aging, rests in self-certainty, confirms itself" (Levinas 1998: 48).

Significantly for our larger discussion, Taylor traces the *explicit* emergence of this heroic, thetic subject to the birth of *Western* modernity. For Taylor, as it is for Heidegger, the creator God finds its death in the birth of the modern, thetic, and thus constructive subject. "Through a dialectical reversal," Taylor writes, "the creator God dies and is resurrected in the creative subject…. As God created the world through the Logos, so man creates a 'world' through conscious and unconscious projection…. The modern subject defines itself by its *constructive* activity. Like God, this sovereign subject relates only to what it constructs and therefore is unaffected by anything other than itself" (1987: xxii). Because it constructs its other, the thetic subject creates, like God, *ex nihilo*. Unlike Dasein, the thetic subject suffers not thrownness and thus is not left to its interpretations. For the Hero, time is simply the medium, the history, through which the self comes to recognize itself. Beginning and end, Alpha and Omega, are ultimately joined in a centripetal movement that is the "non-adventure" of self-consciousness. And though it claims to be a negation of

the theological concern, the thetic subject at the heart of, for instance, atheistic humanism is thoroughly theological. The thetic subject simply usurps the position of the omnipotent, creator god. Along these lines, Derrida notes (in reference to Levi-Strauss's "engineer"):

> If one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one's concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur*. The engineer, whom Levi-Strauss opposes to the *bricoleur*, should be the one to construct the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon. In this sense the engineer is a myth. A subject who supposedly would be the absolute origin of his own discourse and supposedly would construct it 'out of nothing,' 'out of whole cloth,' would be the creator of the verb, the verb itself. The notion of the engineer who supposedly breaks with all forms of *bricolage* is therefore a theological idea. (1978: 285).

Initially unaware of its constitutive activity, "the autonomy of consciousness" eventually comes to understand that it stands under all that it understands. The ego – transcendental or otherwise – is the ground of all putative alterity. The projected other is present and for the self. Derrida writes in this regard, "The ego is the same. The alterity or negativity interior to the ego, the interior difference, is but an appearance: an *illusion*" (1978: 93). Precisely to the extent that alterity is an illusion, nothing troubles the Hero. After all, and as Gadamer would quickly remind us, the Hero cannot disturb, cannot provoke itself. "The God of the philosophers, from Aristotle to Leibniz, by way of the God of the scholastics," notes Levinas, "is a god adequate to reason, a comprehended god who could not trouble the autonomy of consciousness, which finds itself again in all its adventures, returning home to itself like Ulysses, who through all his peregrinations is only on the way to his native land" (1986: 346).

While transcendental subjectivity may be a certain denouement for Western philosophy, it is simultaneously the ontophenomenological presupposition of the colonial intention. Taylor mentions, above, that the thetic subject "struggles" to maintain itself through an aggressive reduction of alterity. That which appears as other is eventually represented through concepts, and thus reduced/mastered.[5] "Intelligibility, characterized by clarity, is total adequation of the thinker with what is thought," Levinas writes, "in the precise sense of a mastery exercised by the thinker upon what is thought in which the object's resistance as an exterior being vanishes. This mastery is total and as though creative; it is accomplished as a giving of meaning: the object of representation is reducible to noemata" (1996: 123–124). Mehta similarly notes in this regard, "In this mastery through objectification, abstraction and conceptualization, there is nothing… which can present itself to this spirit as a barrier that cannot be surmounted. Otherness is overcome here through being grasped,

[5] This of course recalls our discussion from Chap. 4 concerning the Christian *chrêsis* and the Neo-Vedānta's proclivity to inclusivism. Russell T. McCutcheon has recently argued along these very lines: "It is to our own detriment that we often forget that earlier efforts on the part of Christians to convert and missionize, on the one hand, and the more contemporary and largely Christian-initiated efforts at dialogue, on the other, may be intimately related in terms of the shared strategies and technologies that function to translate, manage, and domesticate the other" (2001: 81–82).

comprehended, by the objectifying concept" (PIU 119). The Hero, like the creator God, is thus master. "Philosophical knowledge is a priori," argues Levinas, "it searches for the adequate idea and ensures autonomy. In every new development it recognizes familiar structures and greets old acquaintances. It is an *odyssey* where all adventures are only the accidents of a return to self" (1996: 14). Likewise for Derrida, this is the "the Hegelian Odyssey… within the horizons of a reconciliatory return to self and absolute knowledge" (1978: 93). Like the Hero returning with bounty from the other shore, having mastered, conquered the other, the thetic subject returns to its autonomy. The heroic self comes to recognize with the birth of modernity that the only world and being it can encounter is the one that depends upon its own constructive activity. Husserl writes in this respect: "The epoché can also be said to be the radical and universal method by which I apprehend myself purely: as Ego, and with my own pure conscious life, in and by which the entire Objective world exists for me and is precisely as it is for me" (1960: 21).

When applied to the cross-cultural encounter, it would appear that heroic culture entails universal culture. If the Hero eventually encounters only himself through the conceptual reduction of the other, then heroic culture in effect reduces other cultures to moments within its own history. As cultures come more and more into contact with one another, it would seem that only that which can be digested, that is, appropriated by the Hero, will survive. For Caputo's "Derridean Critique," "tradition is (therefore) largely the story of the winners while the dissenters have been excommunicated, torched, castrated, exiled, or imprisoned" (1989: 264). Colonially speaking, the dominant culture assimilates that which enhances its self-image, allowing the rest to fall away.[6] In this regard, Mehta writes, "Hermeneutics is… *a means of achieving cultural totality*, if not wholeness, by assimilating the other as an element in a total dream image" (WI 174; emphasis added). Here Mehta aligns the model of the Hero with a particular reading of hermeneutics. He senses a cultural imperialism in the hermeneutic project. Such cultural imperialism rests with the thetic subject who, within the past two or three centuries, has recurrently taken on a European dress. Is it merely coincidental that the colonial period coincides with the birth of this heroic subject? Perhaps not. "Though not immediately apparent, this cultural imperialism grows out of the interpretation of the subject that emerges in modern European philosophy," argues Taylor.

> When fully developed, hermeneutics tends to become culturally imperialistic…. The participants in dialectical/hermeneutical conversation move toward the other so they can return to themselves enriched. The "exotic" edifies only when it is first domesticated and then assimilated. The imperialistic implications of this strategy of interpretation become clear in a remarkable statement that Rorty makes in an essay entitled "Pragmatism, Relativism, Irrationalism." According to Rorty, the pragmatist "can only say, with Hegel, that truth and justice lie in the

[6] Lest I seem to favor an anti-Western sentiment here, I need only point out once again, as Mehta himself points out, that modern Hindu intellectuals, e.g., Roy, latched onto rationalist principles that eventually led to the disparaging and denigration of a large portion of the Hindu tradition, e.g., the Purāṇic traditions as well as the Tantric traditions.

> direction marked by the successive stages of *European* thought." *Bildung*, it seems, is identified with the cultural tradition of the West. *Other cultural traditions are valued only insofar as they aid Westerners "in becoming new beings"* (1990: 142, emphasis added).[7]

Philosophical hermeneutics is the hermeneutics of empire, a point not lost on Mehta.

Mehta undeniably spent the last four decades of his life and career embroiled in hermeneutics. At times, Mehta seems to endorse the Gadamerian project. Note the following from 1968: "What is needed here is that spirit of joyous adventure which boldly marches out into the unfamiliar and the alien, without fear of self-loss, and returns to itself, changed and yet the same" (PIU 129).[8] Yet there are a couple of moments in the 1970s, and certainly in the 1980s, where Mehta clearly distances himself from such hermeneutics for reasons similar to those outlined above. Recall that in June of 1988, a month before his passing, Mehta delivered his last public address. It was during this final address that Mehta openly questions the applicability of philosophical hermeneutics to "the question of inter-religious understanding" (PU 275). Recognizing that we have already covered some of this terrain in Chaps. 3 and 4, I nevertheless want to ask at this point: Was this admission of reticence regarding philosophical hermeneutics something to which he had arrived only in the last years of his life? No.

As early as 1969, a year after his ringing endorsement of the heroic project, as well as the commencement of his "turn," Mehta explicitly betrays a suspicion of Gadamer's hermeneutics. He writes:

> Gadamer's explication of the phenomenon of understanding, and his application of this to the philosophical present of the West as it has attained self-awareness in the thinking of Heidegger, is determined by an attitude towards the Western tradition which he shares with Husserl rather than with Heidegger in *its disregard of the existence, claim and world-historical viability of other traditions*. (UT 158, emphasis added)

Mehta seemingly connects here Gadamer's hermeneutics to heroic hermeneutics, that is, to culturally imperial hermeneutics. Moreover, in 1974, the central years of his turn, Mehta writes of Hocking's "philosophical hermeneutics," "Are we not here back to Hegel, to his notion of a potentiality that actualizes itself only by totally comprehending and swallowing up the other… to his vision of hermeneutics as

[7] In a similar manner, Daya Krishna provocatively contends, "In a deep and radical sense… it is only the West that has arrogated to itself the status of subjecthood in the cognitive enterprise, reducing all others to the status of objects" (1988: 78). Rada Ivekovic likewise argues, "As regards the East and the West, not to speak of other directions, there seems to be but one historical 'subject,' and that is the West self-legitimized by placing itself face to face with the Other it is giving itself. This Other, a historical and social construct as much as the subject, is defined through its relationship to the Same, or the subject, but is not supposed to self-define itself. India, among others, has found herself in the role of an Other for Europe, particularly since the 17th century" (1997: 224–225).

[8] Note that even Caputo does not want to do away with "hermeneutics" *tout court*; rather, he simply wants to make Gadamer's tremble a bit: "I am not arguing against hermeneutics, but for loosening the constraints that are imposed upon hermeneutics in its Gadamerian version in order to make possible a more radical hermeneutics… The aim is not to edify ourselves with the thought of transcendental finitude, which is the tendency of Gadamer's appropriation of Heideggerian facticity, but to face up to the infinite slippage, the grammatological infinity, which scrambles everything determinate, definite, and decidable" (2000: 55).

mastery of the other through the concept… hermeneutic as a weapon directed against the other" (WI 183). Unmistakably, Mehta here calls to task philosophical hermeneutics for its "conquest of the alien."[9] Explicitly distancing himself from

[9] Paul Ricouer notes in this regard, "I seek to understand myself by taking up anew the meaning of the words of all men" (1974: 52). James Risser addresses the nuances of Gadamer's hermeneutics in the last couple of chapters of his *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics* (1997). He notes that Derrida, according to Gadamer himself, really attacks a Ricoeurian hermeneutics rather than those of Gadamer: "Gadamer has said on more than one occasion that Derrida's criticism of hermeneutics is a criticism of the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur. To take hermeneutics engaged in the reconstruction of meaning, which is one way of describing Ricoeur's methodological procedure of explanatory understanding, does not accurately describe the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer" (1997: 163). This being said, Risser continuously betrays Gadamer's "Neo-Platonic tendencies" (a point noted by John D. Caputo). Consider: "For Gadamer the eminent text is something in itself that can always say something *more* to the reader" (166); "Both experiences (i.e., philosophy and art) are hermeneutical, both engage in the experience of understanding, both are caught up in interpretation in which the world becomes *larger not smaller*" (186); "What do poetry and philosophy, then, share in common? Certainly, they both share in the effort of communicating, whereby what is imparted becomes *greater*" (189). In all three quotations, Risser in effect suggests that the hermeneutic experience expands the base of the self. In all three, there is conspicuous attention given to the idea that the other enlarges the self. Risser continues: "If understanding would be appropriation, which involves the covering up of otherness, then one surely has entered the sphere of logocentrism. But, for Gadamer, it is precisely the voice of the other that breaks open *what is one's own*, and remains there – a desired voice that cannot be suspended – as the partner in every conversation" (1974: 181, emphasis added). While Risser attempts to preserve the voice of the other here, his rhetoric betrays its good will. The other merely "breaks open what is one's own." In this way, the other is really not an other but merely a partner who can aid the self in its understanding of what is already its own. It may be interesting to note in this regard that even for a pluralistic account of cultural psychology as that found in the work of Richard A. Shweder, we still find remnants of heroic hermeneutics. Consider the following from Shweder (1991): "Yet the conceptions held by others are available to us, in the sense that when we truly understand their conception of things we come to recognize possibilities latent within our own rationality" (5); "Because we are limited in that way, the inconsistency between Roop Kanwar's view of suttee and Allan Bloom's (or a feminist's, for that matter) is not something we need to resolve; it is something we need to seek, so that through astonishment we may stay on the move between different worlds, and in that way become more complete" (19); "Yet, in a postpositivist world that is what an enlightened and noble anthropology ought to be about, at least in part – going to some faraway place where you honor and take 'literally' (as a matter of belief) those alien reality-posits in order to discover other realities hidden within the self, waiting to be drawn out into consciousness" (68–69); "First, there is 'thinking through others' in the sense of using the intentionality and self-consciousness of another culture or person – his or her articulated conception of things – as a means to heighten awareness of our less conscious selves" (108). In all of these citations, the other provides the self the means by which it can come to know itself *better*. For M. C. Taylor, such "colonial" hermeneutics is edifying hermeneutics: "Edification involves the process of building up oneself in and through the expansion of consciousness and self-consciousness brought about by 'acculturation'" (1990: 130). Elsewhere he writes, "The relation to the 'other' is… a self-relation that is self-transforming. The 'other' is not really other but is actually a *moment* in one's own self-becoming. The trick of conversation is to turn around (i.e., converse) in such a way that one rediscovers *self* in other" (1990: 131). The point here and in what follows, is that for Mehta, Caputo, and Taylor, such an other is precluded from rendering the self less. In other words, this reading of hermeneutics seems to preclude the possibility that the other's voice renders the self's previous possibilities defunct rather than augmented: pilgrims do not practice philosophical hermeneutics.

such a reductive "fusion of horizons," Mehta writes, "A certain interfusion of different horizons takes place and otherness is overcome, *to some degree*, between myself and the other, between the past and the present" (PU 268; emphasis added). Despite any conceptual agreements, the other will always retain a certain alterity.[10] In this way, I propose that Mehta directly contests the Hero's philosophical adventure; he contests *philosophical* hermeneutics.

The Greek Hero, Ulysses, is the ethnotropic substitute for the thetic (must we add, Western?) subject that always takes the initiative, whether or not it recognizes itself as such. Endowed with a homeland, an anticipatory forestructure, the Hero projects its other, and then, like Ulysses circling back to Ithaca, re-appropriates/annuls that other in a representation.[11] I submit that such a "struggle to refute transcendence" resonates with Indra's "life and death struggle" that reduces alterity. The Hero's position conditions its own inverse and thus preempts its other by constituting its other. For the Hero, the other is always already fully present for investigation. In this way, the Hero precludes the truly novel event, that is, the chance event, by means of its intentional activity: nothing can shock the Hero.[12] The Hero does not suffer the *rasa* of wonder. The Hero preys without being preyed upon. In effect, and as Auerbach intimates, the Hero, for whom hermeneutics is apparently "a weapon directed against the other," is without time and thus insusceptible to chance.[13] Indeed, through the *guided* peregrinations of heroic hermeneutics, chance is condemned to the status of a "calculable margin."[14] Employing the weaponry of philosophical hermeneutics, the Greek Hero recognizes only that which edifies.

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[10] Mehta's distance from an exhaustive fusion of horizons is not meant here as a direct corrective to Gadamer's own fusion of horizons. In other words, I do not mean to directly attribute to Gadamer any sense that the fusion of horizons exhaustively empties the other of his otherness. This notwithstanding, Gadamer's project, unlike Derrida's, seems to be most concerned with the unity shared between self and other through a common *Sache* rather than on discontinuities. Risser notes in this regard: "The fact that a potentiality for otherness remains suggests that for Gadamer the text remains plural and not for reasons of an ambiguity of its content. Rather, the text remains plural by virtue of the structure of interpretation itself. According to Gadamer, the history of the concept of text shows us that it does not occur outside the interpretive situation; it refers to 'all that which resists integration in experience'" (1997: 164). Gadamer's other, in contrast to Derrida's "bad infinite" and its inherent ambiguity, remains because there is always a positive excess.

[11] "The constructive subject exercises its imperial power through the 'hegemony of representation'," writes Taylor, "Representation – be it philosophical, religious, artistic, or political – presupposes the ego's intentional activity" (1987: 203).

[12] Levinas notes in this regard, "Clarity is the disappearance of what could shock. Intelligibility, the very occurrence of representation, is the possibility for the other to be determined by the same without determining the same, without introducing alterity into it" (1969: 124).

[13] "When the self discovers its own presence in every apparent other," Taylor notes, "altarity is repressed and time negated" (1990: 165). Elsewhere he writes, "If there is no chance and everything is predetermined, time is nothing more than an illusory appearance of eternity" (1997: 261).

[14] "The aleatory margin that they seek to integrate remains homogeneous with calculation, within the order of the calculable," Derrida writes, "it devolves from a probabilistic quantification and still resides, we could say, in the same order and in the order of the same. An order where there is no absolute surprise, the order of what I shall call the invention of the same" (1989: 55).

## 6.3 The Jewish Nomad and Franco-American Postmodernism

Ostensibly contesting the Greek Hero is the ethnotrope of the Jewish Nomad. “To the myth of Ulysses returning to Ithaca,” Levinas writes, “we wish to oppose the story of Abraham who leaves his fatherland forever for a yet unknown land, and forbids his servant to even bring back his son to the point of departure” (1986: 348). Abraham is the Jewish Nomad forced to leave his homeland for a life of errant wandering in the tropical desert. Unlike the edifying centripetality of philosophical hermeneutics, Abraham’s journey appears interminably centrifugal. “Presents always come home,” notes Caputo, “right away or after some time, like Ulysses, circling back economically to the *oikos*, as opposed to father Abraham who left the land of his fathers, never to return again” (1997: 162). Abraham *never* returns precisely because he never reaches the other shore, an accomplishment constitutive for a return trip. “In this life of exile,” Taylor writes, “completion is never possible, for satisfaction always lies elsewhere” (1987: 8).

Unlike Ulysses then, who according to Auerbach is untouched by the temporal flux, Abraham and the other biblical characters are singularly tempered in the fires of time: time that is epiphenomenal for the Hero proves constitutive for the Nomad. “Fraught with their development, sometimes even aged to the verge of dissolution, they [i.e.., biblical characters] show a distinct stamp of individuality entirely foreign to the Homeric heroes,” Auerbach writes. The Biblical characters, unlike the “essential” heroes, mature, a maturity won only at the hands of the other, of time. “Time can touch the latter [i.e., the Hero] only outwardly… whereas the stern hand of God is ever upon the Old Testament figures” (Auerbach 1968: 18). Notice that here “the stern hand of God” tropically marks “time,” recalling our earlier association of Rudra/Śiva with time/death (see Chap. 5). Employing language such as “stern hand,” Auerbach also intimates the distress that “real” time poses to the self that is a Nomad.

The principle difference between the Greek Hero and the Jewish Nomad is that the former suffers not the new. The Hero is, in this regard, pagan. For the Hero, time/God/the other is not. Contrary to the Nomad, the Hero/thetic subject always already contains itself in potential. Since every other for the Hero is merely itself awaiting recognition, the Hero is always already what he will become: “The other in the address ‘draws from me thoughts which I had no idea I (already) possessed’” (Risser 1997: 182). The Hero possesses *in nuce* all his possible outcomes.[15] This is in direct opposition to the Nomad. Auerbach notes, God/time “continues to work upon them, bends them and kneads them, and, without destroying them in essence, *produces from them forms which their youth gave no grounds for* ***anticipating***” (1968: 18, emphasis added). We could perhaps debate here the semantics of “essence” and “anticipation.” To be sure, to produce that which was

[15] I want to point out that we have here a possible Indo-European connection between the Greek Hero and the Hindu God. I will further discuss this below, but for now compare Doniger: “The traditional Hindu belief that at birth one already contains *in nuce* all the possibilities that time will reveal” (1980: 68).

radically unanticipated would seem to be wholly inconsistent with such language as "essence": essence precludes development. This semantic concern notwithstanding, Auerbach's point is appreciated. Nothing really happens to the Hero. The Hero simply realizes his potential. Returning to his original point of departure the same, the Hero is philosophical: "Action recuperated in advance in the light that should guide it is perhaps the very definition of philosophy" (Levinas 1986: 347). In contrast to the Hero's *Lichtmetaphysik*, the Nomad is left to his anxious becoming, anxious because the Nomad is not prepared for what is coming. "The heteronomous experience we seek," continues Levinas, "would be an attitude that cannot be converted into a category, and whose movement unto the other is not recuperated in identification, does not return to its point of departure" (1986: 348). Without such a return, the Nomad's adventure is thoroughly non-hermeneutic; yet of such a position, certain ethical suspicions may arise.

Never returning with a representation that would exhaust the other's alterity, the Nomad, unlike the Hero, finds itself called into question by the other: the other makes a claim on the Nomad. Whereas the Hero putatively imposes itself, the Nomad finds itself checked. Thus, "to approach the Other is to put into question my freedom, my spontaneity as a living being, my emprise over the things, this freedom of a 'moving force,' this impetuosity of the current to which everything is permitted, even murder" (Levinas 1969: 303). Here of course we see the ethical suspicion with which Nomadic thought holds Heroic thought. In a moment of transcendentalism idealism, ethics may be rendered moot. After all, ethics begins with transcendence (Levinas 1969). Monistic systems thus appear incapable of producing an ethic. According to Levinas, it is precisely the other's alterity, an alterity that checks the spontaneous initiative of the thetic/autarkic subject that renders the Hero a Nomad. "The self before any initiative, before any beginning, signifies anarchically, before any present. There is deliverance into itself of an ego awakened from *its imperialist dream*, its transcendental imperialism, awakened to itself, a patience as a subjection to everything" (Levinas 1998: 164, emphasis added). While the Hero preys, the Nomad prays. As spontaneous initiative intimately resonates with heroic imperialism, the other that cannot be anticipated subjects the subject, subjects the Nomad. "Subjectivity is hostage," Simon Critchley notes, "in the sense of being held captive by the other" (1996: 33). Recalling our suggestion from Chap. 2 that the encounter with the other must be blind, we now see that the other figures a blind spot in the optics of the constructive, modern subject, transforming the latter from a Greek Hero and philosopher into a Jewish Nomad.[16] Perhaps it is in this regard that Mehta writes, "I am very intrigued by the resurgence of Jewish intelligence and sensibility, and its incipient operation in the humanistic and religious thought in the States at present" (P 289).

Its pretensions failing, the Nomad that anxiously wants to be a Hero (a transcendental ego who remains the same throughout the passage of accidental time) encounters the shockingly new. Notice Auerbach purposefully writes that the novel outcome of

[16] Taylor provocatively contends in this regard: "To be inscribed in language is to be circumcised and to be circumcised is to be Jewish…. [W]e are all Jews of a sort" (1990: 165).

the subject's life in the biblical stories could not have been *anticipated*. Anticipation precludes nomadic wandering/wondering and becoming.

> The beings remain always assembled, present, in a present that is extended, by memory and history, to the totality determined like matter, a present without fissures or surprises, from which becoming is expelled, a present largely made up of re-presentations, due to memory and history. Nothing is gratuitous. The mass remains permanent and interest remains. (Levinas 1998: 5)

The Hero, unlike the Nomad, may temporarily sacrifice its home, but everything is eventually returned with "interest." Here Levinas points to the economy, or *nomos* (law) of the *oikos* (home), of the Hero. Just as Levinas speaks of an "*interest* that remains" (and can we not read "interest" through a certain capitalism), Husserl too speaks of yielding "the right profit." Indeed, for Husserl we sacrifice only to be rewarded.

> The Objective world, the world that exists for me, that always has and always will exist for me, the only world that ever can exist for me – *this world*, with all its Objects, I said, *derives its whole sense and its existential status*, which it has for me, *from me myself*, *from me as the transcendental Ego*, the Ego who comes to the fore only with transcendental-phenomenological epoché. (1960: 26, 27)

The "transcendental Ego," the Hero, overcomes its nomadic anxiety, its fear of the other that remains other, when, by the "sacrifice" that is the "transcendental-phenomenological epoché," what is given up is ultimately returned with interest, with edification. "Not only the world understood by reason ceases to be other, for consciousness finds itself in that world, but everything that is an *attitude* of consciousness, that is, valorization, feeling, action, labor, and, in general commitment, is in the last analysis self-consciousness, that is, identity and autonomy" (Levinas 1986: 346). This is manifestly not the case for the Nomad. The other for the Nomad provides the moment of self-transcendence in which the self is allegedly altered in his very being, or at least such is the argument Levinas seems to forward. The Nomad does not come to understand something it already possessed. In this way, time for the Jewish Nomad is *messianic*.

While the Hero recollects himself in what could be called the end time of the parousia, the Nomad, to the contrary, is never privileged with such an end. The Omega that would enable the Nomad's chronicle to become a Hero's narrative never arrives. "For Abraham, the Messiah has not yet come and hence human fulfillment is deferred and delayed," argues Taylor, "In the absence of the Messiah's presence, there is no *parousia* here and now. Never allowing himself to be domesticated, the Jew remains a nomad who constantly wanders, roams, and errs" (1987: 8). Messianic time points towards the structurally *to come*. The future, the "to come," is present in the present as that which is *not* presently present. "This apocalypse without apocalypse, the secret without secret, this a-destinal, destinnerant apocalypse is not kept straight by any *Geschick* of Being or Divine Providence or Absolute *telos*," Caputo contends, "but is loosened by the *aleatory alogic of messianic time*, by a certain *chance*" (1997: 100, emphasis added). Messianic time, that is, the time of the Nomad, is the time of the chance event, and thus of the authentic future. Precisely to this extent, the Greek Hero precludes the Jewish messiah; Greek epic/epoché precludes chance.

The heroic ontotheological tradition is in fact erected, according to Taylor, precisely in order to negate such chance. When the self becomes something that could not have been anticipated, in the maximally broad sense of the word, then we have left, like Abraham, the realm of Heroic Western philosophy and entered the realm of Jewish responsibility to the irrationally particular fact, the singular other. Indeed, "Abraham, in remaining faithful to his singular love for every other, is never considered a hero" (Derrida 1995: 79).

Taylor recognizes of course that messianic time is disconcerting for those who had all along heroically assumed otherwise. That is to say, for those who believed in the ultimate rationality of time and history, the idea that the absolutely novel may befall them seems rather anarchical, not to mention despairing. Reflecting on Borges' "The Library of Babel," Taylor notes, "The nausea that vertiginous uncertainty creates is settled by the promise of certainty. The absence or illegibility of an effective prescription leaves *pilgrims* and prodigals to suffer incurable disease" (1984: 76). Notice here Taylor's use of "pilgrim" not to mention the ever-gratuitous "prodigal," anticipations of our return to Mehta's Hindu Pilgrim. For now, to those who find infinite wandering unnerving, Taylor opposes the opposite: "For other carnival-goers, the assurance of an exit takes all the fun out of the fun house. These wary readers are persuaded that *the only thing more disconcerting than uncertainty is certainty*" (1984: 76). How could certainty be more disconcerting than uncertainty?

Taylor's point is that if the end point, if the other is already prefigured in the beginning, as it is for the Greek Hero, then there is nothing left to do but participate *mechanically* in the coming of what was going to come anyway: if there is ultimately a point to everything, then there is no point of chance, and thus no hope of change. Novelty is reduced in certainty: the only possibility for true engagement and true movement depends precisely on the absence of the end time.[17] The parousia, to be sure, counsels stasis, the closure of open structures, the negation of chance. On the other hand, "An open structure would create the possibility of nonreductive explanation, which would leave space for the aleatory" (Taylor 1999: 83). For Levinas, Derrida, Taylor, and Caputo, the Jewish Nomad thus signifies the one for whom the horizon is endlessly open, the horizon of messianic time, of chance. The Nomad's actions are a pure expenditure, a gratuity, for the fruits of that action are for another, an other's time. "To renounce being the contemporary of the triumph of one's work," Levinas argues, "is to have this triumph in a time *without me*, to aim at this world without me, to aim at a time beyond the horizon of my time. It works in an eschatology without hope for oneself, an eschatology of liberation from my own time" (1986: 349).

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[17] On this point, The Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna (1995) ostensibly agrees. Indeed, Nāgārjuna argues that it is only when we acknowledge the ultimate emptiness of all things that we can truly acknowledge the possibility of having the Buddha's teachings make a true difference. Movement takes place only when there is a lack of *svabhāva*, or 'self-essence.' See his *Mūlamadhymakakārikā* XXIV.

It is important to recognize, however, that while chance and surprise certainly bespeak a condition of total unpreparedness, Derrida suggests that the subject cannot simply turn its back on the lessons of the Hero. In other words, Derrida recognizes with Husserl the irreducible intentional activities of the subject. Proposing that such intentions forestall the coming of the other by coloring in advance the horizon to which the other must submit, Derrida argues that deconstruction is an ethical practice of checking in-place intentional structures in an attempt to free up a space for the (w)hol(l)y other. Thus, and unlike the Hero's exhaustive anticipations and intentions, the Nomad merely "prepares" a space for that which is to come, that is, "the messiah." In this way, Nomadic preparation precludes heroic satisfaction: the messiah is *always* to come. Insofar as the messiah, the harbinger of the plenitude of being, is structurally to come, such ostensible satisfaction is forever delayed. "I am careful to say 'let it come'," writes Derrida, "because if the other is precisely what is not invented, the *initiative or deconstructive inventiveness* can consist only in opening, in uncloseting, destabilizing foreclusionary structures so as to allow for the passage toward the other. But one does not make the other come, one lets it come by *preparing* for its coming" (1989: 60). Here Derrida paradoxically points out that what cannot be prepared for must in fact be prepared for by deconstructing the heretofore in-place forestructures that preclude the coming of what cannot be prepared for. Recalling our discussion from Chap. 5, Derrida's ironic intention is hospitality. Caputo explains: "Derrida's growing discourse on hospitality reflects the Jewish and Levinasian provenance of deconstruction, for hospitality is the most ancient biblical virtue of all," "a certain messianic hope in the coming of the other" (2000: 57, 56). Here we see an interesting, as well as significant, reversal of Taylor's interpretation.

While Taylor argues that we are Nomads who have not the capacity to stay with the evanescence of time, and thus pretend to be Heroes, Derrida seems to argue the opposite. Derrida tacitly proposes that we are in fact Heroes to the extent that we cannot simply do away with our intentions, our forestructures, our homeland. Derrida's Hero, like Mehta's Pilgrim, ironically intends to undo his own intentions, "an intention to renounce intention" (Derrida 1997: 174), or, an intention bent on undoing "the law of the same, the assimilatory power that neutralizes novelty as much as chance" (Derrida 2000: 56). This is certainly the opposite of what Husserl theorizes as the encounter with the other: "The body over there, which is nevertheless apprehended as an animate organism, must have derived this sense by an *apperceptive transfer from my animate organism*" (1960: 110). Husserl's ego lends being to the other through the ego's apperception, through the ego's being. According to Derrida, it is just this "apperceptive transfer" that must be deconstructed.[18]

[18] It is interesting to note here that Derrida sees in Gadamer's hermeneutics a certain extension of this apperceptive transfer. In the (in)famous encounter between Derrida and Gadamer, Derrida questions Gadamer's notion of "good will." He questions the sense that the reader must approach the other with good intentions. This would make the encounter with the other ultimately dependent on the self. Risser notes in this regard, "The good will is basically the projection of intelligibility of the text on the part of the reader that is necessary for the text to speak at all" (1997: 168). Is this "good will" not in some way convergent with Husserl's "apperceptive transfer"?

The Other "shows up," if at all, as precisely that which shocks and displaces the subject's apperceptive transfers. Levinas writes:

> The resistance of the Other to the indiscretion of intentionality consists in overturning the very egoism of the Same; that which is *aimed at* unseats the intentionality which aims at it.
>
> … At stake is a movement oriented in a way that is wholly otherwise than the grasp of consciousness and at every instant unravels…. The event of putting into question is the shame of the I for its naïve spontaneity, for its sovereign coincidence with itself in the identification of the Same. This shame is a movement in a direction opposed to that of consciousness, which returns triumphantly to itself and rests upon itself.
>
> But the putting into question of this wild and naïve liberty, certain of its refuge in itself, is not reduced to this negative movement. The putting into question of the self is precisely a welcome to the absolutely other (1996: 16–17)

Deconstructive inventiveness is thus "a welcome to the absolutely other." That the other falls outside the subject's, the Hero's, intentions and anticipations, the subject's position is forever unstable; it is susceptible to surprise and shame. Auerbach reminds us that the Biblical characters "undergo the deepest humiliation…. The poor beggar Odysseus is only masquerading, but Adam is really cast down" (1968: 18). By coming like a thief in the night, the other interrupts the self's spontaneous intentions and initiatives. Echoing Mehta's *rasa* of "o, wonder of wonders," Jean-Luc Marion observes in this regard, "Surprise… contradicts intentionality, which is itself a known and knowing extasis displayed by the *I* and derived from itself; far from covering over the clear terrain of knowable objectivity, when the *I* is transmuted into a *myself/me* it recognizes itself as covered over by an unknowable claim" (1996: 96). The opaque other, the messiah, surprises the self, makes a claim on the self. Notice then the grammar of the Nomad. Accusative cases and intransitive verbs animate the Jewish Nomad. For Taylor, this ultimately means that the Nomad never returns home like the Hero; the Nomad is thus – and most significantly for Mehta's project – *rootless*, homeless. "The impossibility of locating an unambiguous center leaves the wanderer rootless and homeless; he is forever *sans terre*…. The life of erring is nomadic existence that is deeply unsettling. The nomad is an undomesticated drifter, always suspicious of stopping, staying, and dwelling" (1984: 156).

For Levinas, Derrida, Caputo, and Taylor, the Nomad ultimately serves as an ethical model. For all four, if not for a large portion of the Continental school of philosophy, repudiation of the Hero's homeland entails a significant move away from ontology as first philosophy to ethics: "Ethics is the breakup of the originary unity of transcendental apperception, that is, it is the beyond of experience" (Levinas 1998: 148). To renounce homeland and destination is to embrace the uncertainty preclusive of despotic decisions. Nomadic wandering keeps the play in play by always expecting the other that is still to come. Taylor makes the radically ethical point on the penultimate page of *Erring*: "In the absence of The End, there is no ultimate conclusion. *Thus there can be neither definite conclusions nor Final Solution*" (1984: 183, emphasis added). Without a final word, no one can claim to have the final word, and thus fascist politics (to state the most pressing example) have no laurels upon which to rest. In light of an ontologically incomplete story, no one can claim rights of authorship to the "narrative of history." All imperial actions towards the other remain without transcendental justification.

At this point, I would like to propose that the putative antagonism between the Hero and the Nomad actually reflects an inversion that remains bound to metaphysics. That is to say, Hero and Nomad are classical tropic binaries. The Hero pretends to absolute self-sameness. The other for the Hero is merely a penultimate moment on the return to self. The Hero decimates all alterity in the preservation of its imperious egoism through conceptual representations/reductions of the other. The Nomad, on the other hand, denies the Hero's totality and identity *tout court*. For Taylor, the Nomad is "*rootless*," "homeless." Thus while the Hero dreams of a *purity* of identity, it would seem that the Nomad dreams of a *purity* of difference. Indeed, the Nomad would have us believe that he is tied to no land, to no tradition, *rootless*. The Nomad believes he can simply turn his back on heroic hermeneutics. This may not be the case. In fact, such a Nomad devoid of any identification turns out to be "hypermetaphysical." Caputo rightly notes:

> We cannot just avoid or simply step outside metaphysics, which would mean to step outside the logic and the ontologic of our grammar and our intellectual habits. That would be a hypermetaphysical undertaking…. To speak at all is to have recourse to a way of framing and phrasing, to fall back upon a way of dividing up and parceling out, to mark the world up (*archi-écriture*) and to stake it out in one ontocategorial way or another. That is unavoidable. (Caputo 1993b: 220–221)

Indeed, do not Heidegger, Gadamer, and Mehta attest to the fact that facticity is an unavoidable starting point? "Everyone privileges something" (Caputo 1997: 68). To this extent, the Nomad is not the one absolutely cut free, as Taylor would perhaps have us believe. Granted, the factical narrative of any one life is radically open-ended; nevertheless, facticity, as Mehta certainly insists, still roots, and thus interminably soils, the ineradicable point of departure. Gadamer certainly recognizes this when he argues, "Even if we emigrate and never return, we still can never wholly forget" (TM 448). Derrida too makes this point when he suggests that we must intentionally deconstruct our intentions. Most significantly, however, it is precisely the facticity, the rootedness of the subject, not its rootless nomadism, which enables a true encounter with what is other. Fred Dallmayr correctly points out (worth quoting at length):

> Advanced as antidotes or correctives, post-foundational initiatives have a salutary effect. Against the backdrop of our emerging global society (or global village), otherness offers welcome relief from all forms of self-centeredness, including anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism; wherever identity has turned stale or stagnant, nonidentity clearly signals liberation, provided that it is not a counsel of nomadism. What vitiates the latter, in my view, is its escapist vacuity. Unless proceeding from or in the direction of a human habitat, exodus remains an empty escapade (or else simply a mode of self-indulgence). In the absence of a concrete encounter of self and other, of indigenous and alien lifeforms, 'estrangement' cannot possibly happen – that is, otherness cannot really be undergone in a manner yielding a learning experience. By claiming to elude all human settlements, nomadism proceeds in a no-man's land devoid of contrasts and possibilities for sustained engagement. (1993: 150)

For Dallmayr, the pretension to absolute unconditionedness (both heroic and nomadic), the pretension to have eluded facticity, precludes the contrasts constitutive of self and other. The new depends on the old, the other on the same, the aleatory on economy, identity on difference.

At issue here is the Nomad's denial of his own facticity. Claiming to have no home, the Nomad denies its partiality, and in so doing significantly precludes the antagonism between self and other necessary for a learning experience to take place. In fact, and ironically, the Nomad who professes constant movement in fact precludes movement. Through a dialectical reversal, pure nomadic movement is indistinguishable from pure stasis – "anagrammatologically" speaking, the *nom*ad is the *mon*ad. By denying its facticity, the Nomad denies the contrast that affords the space in which the other can be the moment for genuine movement and development. As nomadic and purely rootless, there is no longer a self by which to oppose what is other. Without roots, contrasts fail. Without a same, a subject, an identity, there can be no other, and thus no education. After all, "The absolutely foreign alone can instruct us" (Levinas 1969: 73). But the absolutely foreign can be absolutely foreign, ironically speaking, only in relation to a particular point of departure, a point of departure the Nomad ostensibly renounces. The other, the novel event, the aleatory, can surprise only in relation to that which is not a surprise. "Were a surprise absolute, were we confronted with something absolutely novel, that would make it impossible to recognize the surprise *as* a surprise," Caputo notes, "A surprise means that something else happens *relative* to a horizon of expectations; conceding this 'horizonality' and 'relativity' means that the surprise is not absolute" (Caputo 1993b: 74). The other can surprise us, can teach us, only to the extent that we are rooted and, in fact, wager our horizons. Recall that for Gadamer, "Only the support of familiar and common understanding makes possible the venture into the alien" (1976: 15). If movement, as Auerbach suggests, means undergoing the lessons of the other such that something new emerges that was unanticipated, then the absolute Nomad in his radically errant peregrinations in fact never leaves home, never really travels. The subject must own its horizons before movement can actually take place.

Thus while the modern Hero has borne the brunt of the accusations concerning his imperious ego, we now see that perhaps the postmodern, deconstructive Nomad is actually more ethically and politically suspect. To be sure, the Hero reduces the other's alterity to his domestic horizon by means of representation. The Hero practices a cultural chauvinism. But the Nomad may not be any better, and in fact, may be worse. Recall from our discussion of Heidegger and Gadamer that whenever the subject approaches what is "merely out there," what are generally understood are the subject's own undisclosed assumptions. To repeat from Heidegger: "'What stands there' in the first instance is nothing other than the obvious undiscussed assumption of the person who does the interpreting" (BT 192). By appealing to a prejudice-free stance, e.g., the Nomad who is rootless, the subject in effect, and perhaps unbeknownst to him at the time, imposes his prejudices on the object of interpretation. The rootless Nomad and the enlightened Hero both seem to profess a transcendence of parochial partisanship. That is to say, the Nomad repeats the need of the enlightened Hero. This is the greatest danger. "The *most violent violence*," Caputo rightly notes, "arises from thinking one can dispense with archi-violence and lay hold of some nonviolent thing-in-itself, some absolute, unmediated *arché*. It is just when people think that they have gained access to the unmediated… that the rest of us are visited by the most massive, most

violent mediations" (1993b: 222).[19] Here Caputo's "archi-violence" resonates directly with Heidegger's thrownness and guilt, that is to say, with Heidegger's notion of facticity.

That the subject always projects an interpretation, a highlighting, the pure, unmediated thing-in-itself is functionally non-existent. Nomadism is a noumenal abstraction. Contrary to Taylor's Nomad, the subject always has a take on things to the exclusion of others; the subject is *never* rootless, *never* truly homeless, but always guilty. We are violent by our ontology, and yet it is a secondary violence that most worries Caputo and Mehta. In other words, if we deny archi-violence, then we in effect elevate an archi-violence (i.e., a provincial articulation) to the Archimedean point, thereby denying other Great Beginnings (other "archi-violences") in the name of one Great Beginning seen as *The* Great Beginning. On the political register, it would indeed appear that colonialism is built precisely on the edifice of Caputo's "most violent violence." Thus it is not a question of doing away completely with archi-violence (a hypermetaphysical illusion), but rather of doing away completely with the secondary violence that is synonymous with cultural chauvinism. We are seemingly obliged to conceptualize a model of the wounded Hero, or the homebound Nomad, that is, Mehta's model of the Hindu Pilgrim.

## 6.4 The Hindu Pilgrim Returns to the Plains Below

Mehta would concur with Matthew Arnold, to some degree. "Hebraism and Hellenism, – between these two points of influence moves our world," Arnold observes, "At one time it feels more powerfully the attraction of one of them, at another time of the other; and it ought to be, though it never is, evenly and happily balanced between them" (quoted in Derrida 1978: 79). "Our world" allegedly swings back and forth between the two poles of the Hero and the Nomad. But who precisely is represented by the "our" in Arnold's vision? Is "our world" *the* world, or simply the *Western* world? If the former then we have yet again the persistent Eurocentrism that Mehta consistently contests. Accordingly, Mehta delimits Arnold's "our world" to "the West": Mehta recognizes that *the West's* self-understanding has been caught in this dialectic. "The present self-understanding of the West has been mediated by the dialectic of Athens and Jerusalem" (UT 159). But what about Vrindaban? What about the East? Having understood the Western dialectic, Mehta proposes "setting aside for the moment the learned and bookish models for religious understanding," and in its stead he suggests "the model of a pilgrimage" (PU 275).[20] Perhaps Mehta's Hindu Pilgrim represents the balance. Perhaps it is in India that the West will find the balance between its Hebraism and Hellenism.

[19] McCutcheon also notes in this regard: "Ethnocentrism is not the fact of having a culture but the assumption that one's own culture – as well as the goals relevant to one's own culture – is by definition everyone's goal" (2001: 81).

[20] Throughout the remainder of this chapter I will have recourse to quotations already cited in previous chapters, notably Chap. 5. I will do this for sake of clarity rather than constantly referring the reader to the appropriate passages in the preceding chapters.

Mehta's Pilgrim, recall, travels out to the other as a *tīrtha*, only to return to its home with its *own* idols/concepts destroyed. In this way, the Pilgrim is reconciled to *its* death: pilgrimage is "nothing if not living in the face of death, one's own" (PU 276-277). The Pilgrim's tradition/home suffers irreparable displacement through pilgrimage. Here of course we see what I have been calling the "postcolonial" emphasis in Mehta's hermeneutics. The Pilgrim's owning of his death is an initiative that is in fact a response to the other's enduring alterity. The Pilgrim's initiative is ironic; the Pilgrim embraces "Kṛṣṇa's *na mama*." In this way, the Hindu Pilgrim is the Greek Hero that is a Jewish Nomad. "Understanding others must culminate in self-understanding, as *an acting on oneself but letting the other be*, and in that sense of compassion, be an understanding of the other, not in the sense of an intellectual operation performed on him" (PU 272-273; emphasis added). The Pilgrim's initiative is an acting on *oneself*, an initiative that is in direct contrast to the Hero's initiative. To be sure, the Hero's initiative is an imposition of self through reduction of the other. The Hero's initiative is tied to Kṛṣṇa's *mama*. Heroic culture, the colonial cultures of the modern period for example, impose their vernacular being on the other, the most violent violence according to Caputo. Notably, the Pilgrim's initiative, to the contrary, is "acting on oneself." Acting on oneself, however, does not mean simply supplementing one's previous position with newfound perspectives. Acting on oneself, for Mehta, is receiving the other as a lesson that may in fact destroy one's home. In this way, the Pilgrim's initiative is his self-imposed self-subordination. The Pilgrim, like the Hero, travels and returns. But the Pilgrim's initiative, unlike the Hero's, significantly recognizes the other as irreducibly other.

Just as Derrida points to the future as what is approached *as* unapproachable, just so the Pilgrim's *tīrtha*: the Pilgrim understands the other *as* that which exceeds his understanding. In this way, the Pilgrim forgoes the "conquest of the alien." The Pilgrim lives through its not yet. To this extent, the Pilgrim perhaps resembles the Nomad. But unlike the Nomad, the Pilgrim must return. In its return, the Pilgrim circumvents Dallmayr's "escapist vacuity." That is to say, the Pilgrim is never so errant as to lose the sense that the other is not merely one among many along an indifferent peregrination. While the Hero seeks to impose his lesson, it would seem that the Nomad has neither something to impart nor something to learn. Without a point of reference, the Nomad lacks the identifying marks constitutive of instructional contrast. Thus, in *both* Athens *and* Jerusalem, the voice of the other is reduced. For this reason, I propose that only a return to a *decimated* homeland, to the plains below, ensures that the other's voice retains its *significant* alterity. This only the model of the Pilgrim maintains. While Athens shines in the light of the philosophical sun, and Jerusalem remains interminably split by religious mystery, Vrindaban is the site where self and other cross in irresolvable tension.

Mehta's Uddhava is, I submit, the postmetaphysical alternative to the dialectic of Ulysses and Abraham.[21] Uddhava (the Hindu Pilgrim) claims a point of departure.

[21] I recognize that privileging Uddhava does so at the expense of many other characters in the Hindu tradition(s). All the same, Uddhava illustrates an initial point of departure in Vedāntic ontotheology and ends with a lesson concerning the departed Kṛṣṇa. In this regard, Uddhava is the perfect ethnotrope for Mehta's concerns. Also, as mentioned above, when considered on the transcendental register, we simply cannot have it both ways, that is, that there is both monistic idealism and devoted separation.

In fact, Uddhava at the commencement of his "pilgrimage" (and significantly not his "odyssey") has the universal knowledge imparted to him by Kṛṣṇa, and to this extent, his point of departure is functionally analogous to the phenomenological ego's Ithaca. Uddhava begins his journey as a Hero: Uddhava possesses universal philosophy and yoga, the plenitude of being. But of course notice what happens to this "ultimate truth." Uddhava approaches the *gopīs*. Rejecting his knowledge of Kṛṣṇa, Uddhava's others have no need of such knowledge. Uddhava is, in fact, *unexpectedly* taught by the *gopīs*. Learning the lessons of *viraha bhakti*, or "love-in-separation," Uddhava's knowledge of ultimate truth is tempered by the *bhakta's* "relationship" to that which refuses relationship, that is, to the withdrawn Kṛṣṇa. In Kṛṣṇa's withdrawing absence, the opening necessary for uncertainty, for movement, and ultimately for chance remains. Recalling that Mehta's pilgrimage is an *Irregang*, an errant journey, we now read with Taylor, "The *withdrawal of the sacred* releases one into the infinite migration of error where meaning is unrecoverable and direction undiscoverable" (1999: 45, emphasis added). Of course, for Mehta's Pilgrim, such undiscoverable direction is not bemoaned, but rather is lovingly embraced. Moreover, and resonating with our conversation concerning the *friendship* of Kṛṣṇa, Caputo adds, "For *it is the withdrawal of the friend* that draws us out of ourselves toward the friend, in the happy futility of a pursuit that Blanchot calls *le pas au-dela*, the step (*pas*) beyond I cannot (*pas*) take, the '*passage*' that is always being made and always being blocked" (2000: 60). Here is where I locate a certain equivocation in recent Continental philosophy. Caputo seemingly contests his own messianic logic whose concern is always with the other *to come*. In other words, how do we reconcile the *coming* of the *messiah* with the *withdrawal* of the *friend*?

I propose that it is precisely here that we discern the deep antagonism between the Greek Hero, the Jewish Nomad, and the Hindu Pilgrim. Contesting only in degree the Hero's phenomenology wherein (the) all comes to presence, the Nomad nurtures a horizon wherein the Other is always still *to come*. Precisely to this extent, the Nomad, I argue, remains tied to a metaphysical, phenomenological need. That is to say, the Nomad wants the messiah, the other *to come to presence*. Despite its protestations to the contrary, the Jewish Nomad and its messianic logic thus remain bound to the strictures of the *Lichtmetaphysik*. Mehta's Hindu logic, while certainly joining the Nomad's challenge against the Hero's phenomenology, nevertheless contests this expectant Jewish "a-logic" of the messiah. Kṛṣṇa is not the messiah. Kṛṣṇa is not coming. Kṛṣṇa is a friend. Kṛṣṇa withdraws. *Viraha bhakti* presents a certain *negative* messianic.

Unlike the Jewish Nomad expectantly attending the coming, proclaiming from Paris, "*viens*, *oui*, *oui*," the Hindu Pilgrim that is a *viraha bhakta* in effect celebrates the structural withdrawal of Kṛṣṇa, proclaiming from Vrindaban, "*na mama*." According to Mehta's interpretation, the *bhakta* is at one with Kṛṣṇa precisely through structural separation. The subject that is a Pilgrim is reconciled to the absence of the other. The withdrawal of Kṛṣṇa opens the space of difference that must be thought first in order to subsequently think the same (and here we see the later Heidegger's sense of the ontological difference and the same, *das Selbe*). An ontological difference constitutes the ultimately valid relationship to the other. Opposing the need for presence (either realized or delayed), the *gopīs* embrace the

other's withdrawal. The love of the friend transcendentally requires the withdrawal of the friend. Again, initiative *is* response. Indeed, the *gopīs'* total response, that is, their initiated devotion to the other's total withdrawal ironically fills up their lack. The *bhakta* becomes who she is through her loving devotion, itself predicated upon the structural incompletion of transcendental subjectivity. The Pilgrim's initiative is to work on *its own deconstruction*, its own *na mama*, by means of devoted recognition of, response to, the other's withdrawal, that is, the other's basic alterity. Indeed, where the Nomad intends the coming of the other, placing its time in the initiating present, the Pilgrim's response is to an other that has already withdrawn. Thus the temporality of the two tropes points in different directions. The Nomad is before the messiah; the Pilgrim is after the friend. Derrida notes, "This logic calls friendship back to non-reciprocity, to dissymmetry or to disproportion… it calls friendship back to the irreducible *precedence* of the other" (1997: 63; emphasis added).

As I have previously suggested, this model of the Pilgrim does not remain on the bookshelves of the ivory tower's library. Rather, Mehta, in expounding his position concerning the Pilgrim and pilgrimage, in truth concretely exemplifies this for the contemporary period. Mehta returns to the plains below. Recalling our discussion from Chap. 2, I now suggest that Mehta's Ithaca was his classical Hindu upbringing. Mehta was immersed in the ritualistic and liturgical environs of early twentieth century India. Yet Mehta was not satisfied with his provincial horizons. Mehta wanted to uncover, to unearth, what lay at the roots of the other. At this stage in his career, Mehta resonates with the model of the Hero, with Indra. He wanted to know the opaque other, and in particular the Western other. He took up this pursuit for cross-cultural relationship first as a criminologist, then as a psychoanalyst, and finally as a philosopher who "could understand Western ideas." Mehta's "heroics" carried him through the first few decades of his professional career until he landed in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where and when he began to reevaluate the encounter between self and other. His turn from the Western sources back to his own tradition outwardly repeats the course of the Hero. In fact, Jackson explicitly likens Mehta to Ulysses: "Jorge Luis Borges wrote in *Ars Poetica* 'Ulysses, sated with marvels, wept tears of love at the sight of [his hometown] Ithaca, green and humble.' Similarly, Mehta, filled with marvels of Western intellectual life returned again to India" (1992a: 12). For Jackson's Mehta, India is Ithaca. But is Mehta truly more like Ulysses than Uddhava?

Jackson senses the limitations of his analogy. He writes elsewhere, "If one travels to colonize, manage, convert or sight-see as a tourist, one travels differently than if one goes on a pilgrimage seeking meaning" (1992a: 20). Indeed, the Hero, as we have seen in this chapter, more often than not travels as a colonizer, as a colonialist ready to render the other transparent. Ulysses is not a pilgrim. Mehta is not Ulysses. "Because thinking aims at bringing into view the unthought in what has been thought, because it 'plunges into the dark depths of the welling waters in order to see a star by day,'" Mehta argues, "what it sees and shows forth in its saying can *never be a total disclosure shorn of all mystery*" (1976: xii, emphasis added). Explicitly recognizing that the other will always retain some degree of opacity, he writes further, "We come to see then that thinking is a way of encountering and

experiencing what, through it, comes into view, *emerging from the concealment which it never completely sheds*" (1976: xiii, emphasis added). Opacity, and consequently the possibility of surprise, always remains. To this extent, for Mehta, it is imperative to see the other *as* other. I propose that the other *as* other is only correctly figured through the trope of the one that always already withdraws, that is, the negative messianic. Kṛṣṇa is the negative messiah. For Mehta, the other is indeed a sacred crossing that retains its mystery, facilitating the moment of the self's "not yet." Mehta's daughter, Veena Mandloi, recalls how her father would often attest: "The day you are satisfied with what you have achieved and with what have learned, that is the end of you."[22] Precisely to this extent, Mehta is not the Hero whose life's lessons amount to a mere corroboration, augmentation, or exposition; of course, neither is he the Nomad whose life's lessons amount to no more than a mere curiosity often laden with relativistic indifference. Mehta is the Hindu Pilgrim.[23]

Now, if Mehta is indeed the Pilgrim, then do we not have to witness the extent to which *Mehta's* idols are destroyed? That is to say, if the defining characteristic of the Pilgrim, as opposed to both the Hero and the Nomad, is that the Pilgrim suffers a displacement with respect to his native land to which he must return, then it is our task now to see to what extent Mehta actually allows his others to dislocate him. Recall Halbfass's recognition of Mehta's alienation: "He accepted his exposure to Western forms of analysis and critique and his 'alienation' as irreversible" (1992b: x). For that reason, we now explicitly ask which of the classical Hindu idols are destroyed in Mehta's encounter with the other *as* other?

We can of course immediately recall Mehta's antagonism towards ritual excess. From his writings, as well as from those who remember him, we sense the distance Mehta placed between himself and the ontic ritual tradition of Hinduism. This is not to suggest, however, that Mehta shared with the nineteenth century reformers, e.g., Rammohun Roy, a disdain for Hindu orthopraxy. Nevertheless, Mehta, the postmodern brahman, felt that *hermeneutical tasks* should occupy the modern Hindu's attention. Time and again, he issued a call to take up anew the classical texts in order to make them speak to an audience in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In addition to challenging the "liturgical excess," Mehta also discloses a concern with the god of the philosophers, i.e., the *causa sui* god of Western metaphysics, and by extension, I suggest, the monistic elements of Indian religion. Mehta, joining Heidegger, intently argues that the metaphysical god is the one in whose presence one could neither dance nor sing. "As Heidegger remarks, 'To this God man can neither pray nor make offerings and sacrifices. Man can neither kneel down in awe before the *causa sui* nor can he sing and dance before this God'" (quoted in PMH 477). To this philosophical position, Mehta of course counters with the role of the ecstatic *bhakta* for whom a relationship to the *withdrawal of the friend* is constitutive. It would therefore seem that Mehta favors the role of the religious relationship taken with devotion, love, separation, and wonder as opposed to the philosophical aggression

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[22] Personal communication from 7 July 1999.

[23] Mehta, in fact, once referred to his life's trajectory as "[his] own particular pilgrimage" (MY 65).

taken with conceptual reduction of the other by means of the self's initiative. Now, the question of course – Are these typical Hindu values? Is Mehta simply recapitulating his Hindu tradition? Or, is he merely capitulating to his Western *tīrtha*? Or, rather, as a pilgrim, is Mehta effecting a change in the tradition by privileging one *mārga*/*yoga* over another due to his encounter with the other? How does ecstatic devotion sit, or should I say, dance with the Hindu tradition? Wendy Doniger observes in this regard, "Dance is closely associated with death in the earliest post-Ṛg Vedic texts" (1980: 133). She also notes that the "typical Upaniṣadic view of dance" is that dance is "the epitome of emotional chaos, as the greatest obstacle to the Apollonian spirit of classical Indian religion" (1980: 135). Does Mehta thereby contest the Apollonian spirit and ontology of the classical Indian religion in the name of a postmetaphysical Purāṇic *bhakti* (i.e., his new order)?

Perhaps most telling of Mehta's "displacements," his "irreversible alienation," is his questioning of Hinduism's traditional inclusivism, its proclivity to *heroic* fusion and stasis. Indeed, Hindu intellectual life has often been wont to reduce the other to a moment within a synchronic whole, usually with Advaita Vedānta claiming pre-eminent status (Halbfass 1988).[24] Precisely to this extent, Mehta suggests that the classical Hindu tradition, much like the Western metaphysical tradition, is taken with heroics: "In its understanding of both itself and the other, India has followed *the way of growth through absorption and assimilation*, *rejecting what could not be appropriated without its own disintegration*, accepting from other cultures whatever could be suitably transformed to become part of its living body" (PIU 117; emphasis added). This is, to be sure, heroic fusion. Mehta thus argues that India has too readily assumed the ultimate identity of different traditions. Too often has India narcissistically seen itself in other.

> It [i.e., India] must strive to comprehend the other in its otherness, let it speak to us in its difference from us and allow it to lay hold of us in its claim to truth. I make bold to suggest that such an approach to what is other is somewhat alien to the genius of our entire tradition and the task therefore correspondingly difficult and against the grain for us; also that we cannot take the first steps towards an understanding of other religious traditions unless we first notice and acknowledge understandingly this more *basic difference* at the root of the cultural traditions of East and West. (PIU 117; emphasis added)

Yet on this very point of "basic difference," Mehta offers seemingly conflicting statements. That is to say, throughout his writings, Mehta oscillates back and forth between issues of ultimate identity and ultimate difference. The above comments are from 1968. Now consider some reflections in 1979: "I suppose that in the end it is this sense of a mysterious unity in all otherness as concretely experienced and

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[24] This privileging of Advaita Vedānta continues. Alan Roland, whose work is quite significant as far as developing a model of the self tailored to South Asia, repeats this prejudice: "Without positing the realization of an inner spiritual self (*Ātman*) – a self considered to be one with the godhead (*Brahman*) – as the basic and ultimate goal of life (*mokṣa*), it is virtually impossible to comprehend Indian psychological makeup, society, and culture" (1988: 289). Here Roland makes Indian culture and psychology functionally equivalent to the position of Advaita Vedānta. For a psychological criticism of Roland's position, see Ellis (2009).

enabling us to want to listen to the alien voice" (MY 71). Also, "The making of distinctions and the setting of boundaries is a great art…. But distinctions presuppose a prior unity and they demand a subsequent restoration of lost unity" (MY 73). Here Mehta endorses an ultimate unity amongst the various traditions of the world. To this extent, Mehta seemingly resonates with Advaita Vedānta's inclusive ontology. To be sure, the idea of a primordial unity that must be restored parallels certain Advaitic notions of Brahman and *māyā*. Yet, 5 years later, Mehta expressly states: "The main task for philosophical reflection in India… is… the making of distinctions rather than starting out with an assertion of blanket identities between Eastern and Western philosophemes" (SCW 192). He also states in the same essay: "The rhetoric that has shaped us in India for a longer period is vastly different philosophically and religiously" (SCW 202). Elsewhere employing his "forté", "the contemplative interrogative," Mehta asks, "Does not the conception of philosophy as criticism… itself require us to examine the nature and credentials of these Western terms, and seek to have a clear awareness of the difference between them and those embedded in the Indian tradition?" (TRV).[25]

I argue that in the end Mehta sensed the at-times incommensurable differences between East and West to the extent that the popular emphasis on Advaitic non-duality is eventually solicited by a critical sensitivity to an ontological difference that underwrites cultural disparity. This is in fact the lesson Mehta takes from his Western kind of *ṛṣi*. He writes:

> [Heidegger's] thought discloses, to an Indian as well as to the self-understanding of the West, the inmost core of the Western philosophical enterprise, its very wellspring, and the hidden logic of its development. Obviously, this perspective has no binding character and does not exclude the possibility of other perspectives, but this in no way entitles us to dismiss it as fanciful, or to overlook the impossibility, after Heidegger, of going back to Hegel and to interpretations of world history directly or indirectly inspired by him. *For all non-Western civilizations*, however *decrepit or wounded*, Heidegger's thinking brings hope, at this moment in world history, by making them see that though in one sense (and precisely in what sense) they are inextricably involved in Western metaphysical history in the form of 'world-civilization', as Heidegger has called it, in another sense *they are now free to think for themselves, in their* ***own*** *fashion*. (IM 31; emphasis and boldface added)

Here Mehta sums up his intellectual encounter with Heidegger. Mehta undertook Heideggerian philosophy with the intentions of understanding the West in its innermost philosophical core, and to use this understanding to resuscitate and rebuild the *different* Indian horizon for the contemporary period. In this way, Mehta's India of the late twentieth century no longer sees the other as a mere supplement.

> The only difference in this two-sided, mutual participation [i.e., cross-cultural dialogue] is that from the Western end it is in the *nature of supplementing the substance of their mainstream culture*, an assimilation of the alien and subordinating it within *a more widely based totality*. From the non-Western, including Indian, the participation is *an appropriation of the substance itself*, not peripheral as in the Western case, and the only question is, how deep does this approximation go. (MT 230, emphases added)

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[25] On Mehta's "contemplative interrogative" see Jackson (1992b: 290).

Mehta points directly to the similarity and contrast between the Greek Hero and the Hindu Pilgrim. Both, to be sure, return home; but for the Hero, the other is a supplement, an edifying moment in the expansion of the Hero's "widely based totality." The Pilgrim, on the other hand, returns displaced at his core, "an appropriation of the substance itself." I propose that this is the very distinction between philosophical and postcolonial hermeneutics. What is more, and despite his occasional enthusiasm for the Vedānta, Mehta indicates a transition that in effect overcomes the transcendental egoism of the non-dual Vedānta. Having lived through the ills of modernity's heroic colonialism, Mehta conspicuously traces a Hindu logic particularly apt to contest the very presuppositions of such ethics and politics.

Central to Mehta's Hindu philosophy, as witnessed in the previous chapter, is the denial of the totalizing self. The "sacrificial formula" of Mehta's Hindu logic speaks directly to this – *na mama* ("not mine"). Of course, the classical Hindu tradition is replete with the denial of the "small self," that is, the *ahaṃkāra*, the ego. We see this type of thinking especially in the Advaita Vedānta and Sāṅkhya-Yoga. But notice that for classical Hinduism such a denial is always in the service of what is in effect a hyper-affirmation. That is to say, the Hindu tradition tends to deny the empirical self in the name of the universal, transcendental self (*Ātman-Brahman*). The point to be considered here is that Mehta seemingly denies this "universal self" as well. It would appear that the *Ātman* does not link back to the plenitude of being that is *Brahman*. Significantly, and as Halbfass suggests, the popular doctrines of monistic *mokṣa* may in fact overlook the hidden presupposition of the Hindu tradition – "the idea of a primeval opening, separation, holding apart is of extraordinary importance in Vedic cosmogony, and it remains a significant, though often forgotten presupposition in later developments of Indian thought" (Halbfass 1988: 317). In this regard, recall that at the Simla conference in 1987, Mehta suggests (with reference to Buddhism) that the Advaitic emphasis on identity must be tempered by a recognition of difference. He states:

> We have the same thing in Advaita here in India. We have emphasized oneness and identity so much that we have not paid sufficient attention to the differences in things. You cannot really understand the sameness between A and B unless you notice that A is different from B. It is the power of the negative and this is what Buddhism is about. (LW 230)

I suggest that Mehta in effect employs just such a difference, just such a presupposition. The question is, does Mehta thereby present a break from the classical Hindu tradition *tout court*?

Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar attest to the polarity within the Hindu tradition between the ideals of fusion and separation.[26] They consider this polarity to be represented, telling for us, by the Vedāntic and Purāṇic traditions respectively. Doniger observes:

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[26] I find Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar useful here in that both employ psychoanalytic as well as philosophical themes in their interpretations of Hindu tropes, a methodology certainly most familiar to Mehta. They are also considered general authorities on the Hindu tradition. It should be noted once again that references to Doniger's work are ultimately references to her work while she was still publishing under the name, "Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty."

> *Bhakti* stands… in clear contrast with both Vedāntic and Tantric Hinduism; and the fact that the Purāṇas generally follow the *bhakti* pattern of having the worshipper identify with the consort may be taken as yet one more instance of the generally non-Vedāntic thinking of the Purāṇas. For in Advaita monism, the worshipper *is* the god and cannot possibly approach god erotically; in Tantrism, too, the worshipper occasionally identifies with the consort but more often visualizes himself as the god (or the goddess, as is often the case). (1980: 87)

Doniger goes on to note that the *bhakti* philosopher, Rūpagosvāmin, states that when the devotee seeks a role to play in the divine *līlā* ("god's play"), he may choose any one *except* the god, *the other*. In this way, the divine *līlā* maintains a fundamental difference and ultimate separation between devotee and deity, self and other.[27] Doniger further argues that this otherness plays itself out in the classical Indian philosophemes of *mokṣa* and *māyā*, again respectively related to the Vedānta and the Purāṇa. She writes of the "general dichotomy between the *mokṣa*-oriented, Vedāntic level of Hindu society and the rebirth-oriented 'transactional' level…. Some Indians have a positive attitude to the process of flow and, indeed, to the world of *māyā*, while others have a negative attitude" (1980: 47).

Here we see the introduction of two themes structurally implicated in any discussion of Vedāntic fusion and Purāṇic separation, that is, stasis and flow. The *mokṣa*-oriented Advaita Vedānta envisions an ultimate stasis, repeating Indra's rim, and this tends to endorse the Hindu resistance to dynamism, divulging its Apollonian nature. "If all things flow, as Parmenides said, the Hindu wishes to *stop* the flow or to reverse it" (O'Flaherty 1980: 58). Doniger also writes of the "Apollonian aspect of religion typical of the Brāhmaṇas – a *static*, ritualized sublimation of the creative spirit" (1980: 134). Elsewhere she notes, "Vedic/Purāṇic Hinduism is phenomenal and dynamic; Vedāntic mysticism opposes to this dynamism a kind of *stasis*" (1980: 332). Notice here that Doniger, like Mehta, sees the Purāṇic as repeating the Vedic. Mehta, of course, combined the Veda with the Upaniṣads (Vedānta), considering the Purāṇas a "new" order. This notwithstanding, there is an interesting convergence here in that while Doniger sees the Veda and the Purāṇa as connected through their emphasis on transactional dynamism, I argued in Chap. 5 that Mehta's Purāṇic *bhakti*, his third stage, was ultimately a repetition of the Vedic stage, a repetition of the separation between self and other. Both Mehta and Doniger suggest in this way that the Veda and the Purāṇas share a structural emphasis on the dynamic relationship. Mehta, in fact, explicitly indicates this dynamic aspect of the Vedas when speaking of the three tiered topography of the *Ṛgveda*, i.e., earth, sky and the vault of heaven: "The topography *does not define a static structure*, which is *rather an intensely dynamic field*, with *incessant transaction* going on between the immortal 'shining ones' [i.e., Adityas]

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[27] Doniger thus contests Spratt's interpretation of the theistic and bhakti traditions. Spratt writes, "From the psychological point of view, therefore, all the six philosophical systems traditionally accepted as orthodox are fully narcissistic. Other philosophical systems, propounded by leaders of theistic or bhakti movements, have attained popularity. But just as the Samkhya and the Vaisheshika combine ontological pluralism with psychological monism, so many of these theistic doctrines encourage not only worship but identification with God, and so are in the psychological sense monistic and narcissistic" (1966: 45–46).

above and the mortals on earth below" (RV 279; emphases added). Ultimately for Mehta, the dynamism issuing from the devotee's separation from the other entails a displacement of the stasis characteristic of Vedāntic *mokṣa*.

Kakar locates the same tension between fusion and separation at the root of "Hindu psychology" (1981: 34). He observes, "The essential psychological theme of Hindu culture is the polarity of fusion and separation. To be sure, this is the universal theme, a dynamic counterpoint between two opposite needs, to merge in to and to be differentiated from the 'Other', where the 'Other' is all which is not the self" (1981: 35). The Hindu tradition, according to Kakar, and thus corroborating Mehta's logic, involves the question of self and other. Here, of course, we revisit some of our main concerns in the last chapter. Did Indra not "merge" with his other? Indeed, Indra encloses all as a rim encloses spokes. On the other hand, the *gopī* "loves" the maintenance of her separation from the Other. Although the *gopīs* explicitly long for union with Kṛṣṇa, I propose that what the text actually presents, and how Mehta reads it, is a separation from a *withdrawn* other. Indeed, when read phenomenologically, *viraha bhakti* betrays the structural maintenance of separation. It is, once again, precisely such separation that is in fact the transcendental condition for a loving relationship. Accordingly, the *gopīs'* love of separation is logically, not chronologically, prior to their longing for union. Moreover, implicated in such questions of fusion and separation, stasis and dynamism are questions of time and death. According to Kakar, "The psychological importance of the theme of fusion and separation lies in its intimate relation to the human fear of death" (1981: 35). This is a most important point. For Mehta, the Pilgrim is intimately visited by the reality of its own structural incompletion. Likewise, the Pilgrim as *bhakta* is related to song and dance, the latter being associated with death in the early post-Vedic texts according to Doniger. Could we not now ask, does the *gopī* celebrate its death, its separation from the Other, through song and dance? Do the *gopīs* celebrate their incompletion?

Like Mehta's *mama* and *na mama*, Kakar also addresses two types of death. He writes, "The fear of death… contains these two elements: the fear of dependence and obliteration as an individual in the state of fusion (e.g., *mama*), and the fear of unimaginable loneliness, emptiness and desolation in the state of separation (e.g., *na mama*)" (1981: 35). Indra, of course, celebrates *mama*, the pole of fusion. He, in this way, would seem to be closer to the classical Hindu "model": "For Hindus, the 'right', 'healthy', or 'true' fulcrum on the continuum between fusion and separation is much closer to the fusion pole than in Western cultures" (Kakar 1981: 36). Kakar thus suggests that Hindus classically privilege Indra's rim, and consequently Vedāntic fusion. In fact, is it not the stasis of ritual excess that forms a definitive characteristic of Hindu orthopraxy? Did not the fear of ritual error replace the fear of death? Speaking of a Hindu child's extended family, Kakar proposes, "This 'widening world of childhood' employs religious tradition, *ritual*, family ceremony… to shore up family and caste relationships against outsiders, and *against the future*" (1981: 126).[28] Again we see the deployment of ritual to thwart the effects of the future/time/death.

[28] Here I could add that to shore up against the future is to shore up against that which a chancy future might bring.

I propose that Mehta's Pilgrim contests precisely this predominant tendency within the Vedānta towards fusion and stasis. I suggest that Mehta's postmetaphysical interpretation of Hinduism in the end comes out on the side of separation and dynamism. Thus the old order of fusion and Apollonian stasis, that is, the classical Vedāntic order, is apparently succeeded. But notice further that Mehta's Pilgrim significantly exceeds Kakar's Hindu psychology as well. For Kakar, death in both its aspects is something of which the Hindu *fears*. Kakar's "Hindu psychology" in effect disallows reconciliation to death. Now, is Mehta's Pilgrim fearful? No. Unlike Indra, Mehta's Pilgrim, Uddhava, becomes a *bhakta*, and like the *gopīs*, fears not but lovingly embraces the structural separation from Kṛṣṇa. Death through separation does not entail fear in Mehta's new order. Accordingly, the theme of separation is intimately connected to other themes and exclusions – Vedānta : Purāṇa :: old order : new order :: Apollonian philosophy : ecstatic *bhakti* :: fusion : separation :: stasis : dynamism :: fear of alienation : embracing alienation :: fear of death : embracing death :: ritual : dance. Mehta's new Hinduism, his post-Vedānta Hinduism, overcomes its liturgical emphasis, for it has overcome the need to conquer the other/the future/death through the ritual shoring up of self. Mehta's new order recognizes structural separation from the other, and thus recognizes the true movement of time. By embracing the *na mama*, Mehta's Hindu philosophy seemingly overcomes the Vedānta's *mama*.[29] "Poetry and philosophy, both wordy affairs," writes Mehta, "are expressions of man's irrepressible urge to overcome his finitude, but as forms of mediation, *they* ***never*** *allow this distance between man and transcendent reality to lapse totally*" (LLY 182; emphasis and boldface added). In this distance lies the novelty and contingency central to Mehta's philosophy: the "expansion of understanding… the only safeguard against the dogmatism which… halts the emergence of novelty" (PIU 129).

I thus argue that Mehta escorts Hinduism through the epoch of posts and into the "epoch" of separation, a certain post-Vedānta epoch. For the *bhakta*/Pilgrim/Mehta, every other is structurally other. In Mehta's "new order," there is no fusion, nor is there a fear of the other that remains other. The Pilgrim is reconciled to incompletion and thus to the death of its presumed transcendental identity. In this respect, Jackson notes: "For years his [Mehta's] own deeper cargo was concealed. 'Self knowledge' at the end meant being a pilgrim to one's Ur-revelation or spiritual mountain home, joined in postmodern *communitas* with fellow journeyers, all facing the common fate of losing their breath – inevitable death." (1992a: 20). Mehta's Hindu logic begins with a need for fusion and stasis (recall Indra's rim) and ends in a passionate celebration of separation. The withdrawal of the sacred, Kṛṣṇa's present absence, precludes precisely such Advaitic fusion and immortality.[30] Despite

[29] Eliot Deutsch writes in regard to the Vedānta's *Brahman*: "Phenomenologically, then, Brahman is affirmed by the Advaitin as that *fullness of being* which enlightens and is joy" (1969: 10).

[30] On just this point, Taylor notes, "The sacred is no longer associated with excess of primal plenitude or undifferentiated totality. Far from holding the promise of mystic fusion, the crypt of the sacred opens a space that makes fusion impossible and unity secondary rather than primary" (1999: 42).

the language of "fusion," the Pilgrim "annihilates his own ego in an attempt both peremptory and utterly humble, to fuse with another presence. Having done so he cannot return intact to home ground" (LLY 157). The Pilgrim, precisely unlike the Hero, annihilates his metaphysical self; the Pilgrim, precisely unlike the Nomad, returns to home ground, a home nevertheless wounded from the encounter with "the other in its unassimilable otherness" (PIU 117). Inasmuch as pilgrims are friends, they must celebrate the wound: "This condition of (im)possibility of friendship is the time of the irruptive wound…. In a certain sense we must… celebrate this wound… for without it no friendship is possible" (Reynolds 2010: 671).

As Mehta makes clear, one interpretation of *viraha bhakti* clearly lends itself to the furtherance of the meta-ethical criticism of transcendental idealism – both Husserlian and Advaita Vedāntin – and the ethically suspect solipsism it entails. Mehta's Hindu negative messianic is that structure lodged at the heart of transcendental subjectivity that promises that the other is not only not presently present but is in fact forever withdrawing. The plenitude of being that the imperious, transcendental ego either aggressively pursues (Heroic Indra) or mistakenly believes is already accomplished (Nihilistic Duryodhana), the same plenitude for which the messianic ultimately holds out hope, is forever lost to the other-as-withdrawing. In this regard, and from the meta-ethical perspective, the ethnotropic substitute for transcendental subjectivity is not the Greek Hero (i.e., the Husserlian ego) nor is it the Jewish Nomad (i.e., the Derridean deconstructive subject). Rather, the most accurate, meta-ethically sensitive ethnotrope for transcendental subjectivity is, I submit, the Hindu *gopī* and its negative messianic. Mehta's *gopī*, his Hindu Pilgrim is the model for a postcolonial hermeneutics.

## 6.5 The Trope of Woman in Mehta and Levinas

Before proceeding to the conclusion of this book, I feel that I must return to some unfinished business from Chap. 5. There I intimated that Mehta's Hindu logic involves a displacement of the masculine. In effect, the trope of man invariably represents the thetic subject, that is, the subject tied to the will-to-power's initiative. Recall that Indra, Arjuna, Duryodhana, and Uddhava all assume initiatory positions (of course, Arjuna's initiative is not quite as self-assured as would seem to be the case with the other three). Here I put forward the hypothesis that both Mehta and Levinas strategically deploy the trope of woman to trace that subject for which a deep passivity is constitutive. This passivity obliquely indicates that which formally antecedes the thetic subject's projections, that is, the other's initiative. To this extent, the other's address locates the advent of the subject in the accusative, irreparably rending the subject's totality (a totality linguistically marked by the nominative), leaving a residue of alterity deep within the subject. While, on a linguistic register, this subject resonates with the accusative, with respect to gender it resonates with the feminine.

The discussion of the feminine accusative subject also entails a discussion of datives as well as genitives. By first responding, the subject loses its autarkic

indiscretion marked by its commitment to the imperious nominative. As a pure responding, the address to the other takes the form of the dative: the address is *to* the other *as* other. Succeeding the other's address, the subject discloses that it is never proper, never a proprietor. In other words, that the subject is ironically constituted by a lack of the other, the subject can never properly assume the role of the genitive subject. Here of course we revisit Mehta's "*na mama*." Thus our discussion in this final section entails a meditation on gendered, linguistic subject positions. Significantly, all of this in turn traces both a "post-deconstructive subjectivity," as well as a post-Vedānta subjectivity. As I mentioned in the introduction, the land of posts curiously gestates a land of births as well. "The new determination of the 'subject' in terms of responsibility, of an affirmative openness to the other prior to questioning," Critchley points out, "is something that can only be attained after having gone through the experience of a deconstruction of subjectivity, that is, the kind of Heideggerian deconstruction" (1996: 47). If the other is the *tīrtha*, and as such beyond questioning (as Garuḍa was to Rāma), then the *gopī*, like the Hindu Pilgrim, is the ethnotrope for a post-deconstructive subject.

For Levinas, the structure of signification reveals that the subject is from the first for-the-other. That is to say, the act of signification, regardless of ontic content, betrays the subject's initial activity as an address to the other that is actually a response, a response preclusive of conceptual reduction. "The act of saying will turn out to have been introduced here from the start as the supreme passivity of exposure to another…. There is an abandon of the sovereign and active subjectivity, of undeclined self-consciousness, as the subject in the nominative form in an apophansis" (Levinas 1998: 47). Here Levinas points directly to the secondary nature of the nominative, and could we not add heroic subject? The very opening of language is the act of saying. But saying, structurally speaking, is a movement outward to the other. Derrida, commenting on Levinas, notes in this regard, "The dative or vocative dimension which opens the original direction of language, cannot lend itself to inclusion in and modification by the accusative or attributive dimension of the object without violence" (1978: 95). That the advent of the subject comes in the form of signifying for the other necessarily entails that this other antecedes the subject and thus to ascribe the accusative position to the other is to do violence to the other's proper linguistic designation as a nominative subject in his or her own right. The dative recognizes alterity's excess, that is, that which escapes what accusative language captures. Accordingly, the presumed, nominative autarky of the subject must recognize its own ontologically accusative condition. Jean-Luc Marion explains:

> The claim… interpellates me. Before I have even said "I," the claim has summoned me, named me, and isolated me as myself. Moreover, when the claim resounds… it is only appropriate to respond… and to respond by saying, "Here I am!" or, "See me here!" (*Me voici!*), without saying or claiming to advance the least "I"…. The nominative gives way decidedly to that which… appears to be an accusative case. (1996: 94)

The other nominates the self, and thus the self responds by acknowledging its nomination, its accusative subject position – "*me voici!*" ("Here I am!") Contesting deeply the subject's pretensions to sovereign self-sameness, the other formally rends the self. "This being torn up from oneself in the core of one's unity, this absolute noncoinciding,

this diachrony of the instant, signifies in the form of one-penetrated-by-the-other" (Levinas 1998: 49). Notice immediately that the sexual language used here indirectly suggests the gender of the rent subject. Subjectivity for Levinas is tropically marked by a delimited feminine, that is to say, by *maternity*.

> It is being torn up from oneself, being less than nothing, a rejection into the negative, behind nothingness; it is *maternity*, gestation of the other in the same. Is not the restlessness of someone persecuted but a modification of maternity, the groaning of the wounded entrails by those it will bear or has borne? In maternity what signifies is a responsibility for others, to the point of substitution for others and suffering both from the effect of persecution and from the persecuting itself in which the persecutor sinks. *Maternity*, which is bearing par excellence, bears even responsibility for the persecuting by the persecutor. (Levinas 1998: 75).

The maternal is that for which an other always already demands nurturance. The maternal, the delimited feminine in Levinas's Judeo-philosophy, cares for the irreducible other that structures the subject's response-ability. To this extent, the maternal foregoes its initiative in light of an always antecedent other. Levinas speaks of "an irrecuperable pre-ontological past, that of maternity" (1998: 78). The maternal is radical passivity, "a pure undergoing" (Levinas 1998: 79). This is, I propose, analogous (if not homologous) to the role the feminine trope plays in Mehta's work.

For Mehta, the *gopī* absolutely foregoes its initiative. As the trope that figures the essence of *bhakti*, the *gopī* entails "[*L*]*etting oneself be caught* in such a grip by the Invisible, and by the invisible truth of what is visible and *loving the enchantment that befalls us* is of the *very essence of bhakti*, as against all spiritual striving in which man *takes all initiative upon himself*" (B 210; emphases added). Here, in no uncertain terms, the essence of Mehta's new order involves the feminine foregoing of initiative, of philosophy, of certain knowledge. Just as for Levinas's maternity, so too for Mehta's "lover-in-separation" (the *gopī/bhakta*), the deep structure is passive, "letting oneself be caught." Recall further that Draupadī, according to Mehta, did not need the manifestation of Kṛṣṇa in order to proclaim friendship and this in pointed contrast to Arjuna's need for Kṛṣṇa's presence. In this way, Draupadī "bears" witness to her friendship. "The Infinite does not appear to him that bears witness to it," Levinas ostensibly concurs, "On the contrary the witness belongs to the glory of the Infinite. It is by the voice of the witness that the glory of the Infinite is glorified" (1998: 146). Significantly it is *only* in Kṛṣṇa's present absence that Draupadã can in fact bear witness.[31] Along these lines, Marion notes:

> If I knew in advance that Being, or indeed the Other… summoned me, then I would immediately escape from the full status of an interlocuted, since I would be free of any surprise…. Anonymity belongs strictly to the conditions of possibility of the claim, because it defines the unconditional poverty of the latter (i.e, the "me" as opposed to the "I"): in conformity with the principle of insufficient reason, the claim does not have to become cognized

[31] On this note, I believe even Derrida senses that his messiah needs to be a figure of withdrawal insofar as he argues that should the other actually come to presence then the whole affair is over: "I would therefore command him to be capable of not answering – my call, my invitation, my expectation, my desire…. If you answer my call, it's all over" (1997: 174).

> in order to become recognized, nor does it have to be identified in order to be exerted. Only this poverty is sufficient to wound subjecti(vi)ty and exile it outside of any authenticity. (1996: 100–101)

Also, and with respect to our Greek Hero who is certainly the figure of initiation, Caputo adds, "Hospitality, as Penelope learned while Ulysses was off on his travels, means to put your home at risk, which simultaneously requires both having a home and risking it" (2000: 57). Notice immediately that here Penelope – significantly a woman – curiously converges with the structure of the Pilgrim. Hospitality, like pilgrimage, is the paradoxical maintenance-of-home-at-risk, a task neither the Hero nor Nomad are prepared to undertake.

It is also important to notice that Mehta's deployment of the feminine trope is not a radical departure from the Hindu tradition. Indeed, the role of woman in the *bhakti* traditions is well known. To be sure, the devotee, the *bhakta*, is understood to be a woman (even when a man). Doniger comments in this regard, "The devotee visualizes himself as a woman not merely because god is male but because in the Hindu view the stance of the ideal devotee is identical with the stance of the ideal woman" (1980: 88). She also cites the following from Glen Yocum, "As Nammalvar in the role of a gopī pointedly says, 'Our female nature yields to you' (*Tiruvaymoli* 10.3.6). Women yield; proud men don't. Men must renounce their masculinity if they would be devotees" (1980: 88). Recognizing, of course, that the subservient role of woman in South Asia is often said to be complicit with an androcentric emphasis on the authoritative man, I all the same argue here that Mehta reads the feminine postmetaphysically. That is to say, the trope of woman in the devotional texts resonates not with a fleshy body as such (for it can represent both genders), nor with an essential identity; but rather, it stands in for that which frustrates metaphysical identity and initiative. The trope of woman effectively traces the "negative genitive" subject. The woman/*gopī*/*bhakta* says "*na mama*." I thus propose that for both Levinas and Mehta the feminine effectively serves as the trope for the one for whom the other's alterity eludes reduction to the intentional horizon. In Kṛṣṇa's absence, Draupadī datively testifies to his friendship (his withdrawal) and as such precludes the nominative "I" from the position of preeminence as well as propriety. "It is necessary, then, that the claim ultimately be referred to a pole whose initiative rends or tears subjecti(vi)ty, by its silence or by its sound" (Marion 1996: 99).

The future cross-cultural dialogue, for Mehta, must actively maintain the challenge of the other *as* other, not merely as a penultimate moment in self-becoming, but rather as the other to whom the self is called on to respond. That is, the self must allow the other to destroy the self's own idols, its own facticity. In the end, pilgrimage wagers what is dearest to the Pilgrim, and in this regard the Pilgrim suffers emancipation at the hands of the other *as* other. The Pilgrim/pilgrimage is a model for an iconoclasm that neither the Hero nor the Nomad fully embraces. For the former, the other is merely a moment within the corroboration and edification of self; for the latter, the other is merely a moment in the evanescent flux of others that never

truly teaches an ever-wayward prodigal. In this regard, I propose that Mehta's Pilgrim effectively traces the wounded Hero, the homebound Nomad, the post-Vedānta subject, that is, the devotee.

Perhaps more than he realized, Halbfass was correct in suggesting that Mehta never reached his destination. Recall how Halbfass described Mehta's sudden death: "J. L. Mehta's death, far away from his Indian homeland and destination." Factically speaking, Mehta, indeed, passed away far away from India. But was his Indian homeland his destination? Conjunction, to be sure, need not entail equation. Perhaps we ought to read this "destination" on a transcendental register. Transcendentally speaking, destination may be understood as achieving the plenitude of being, and, as we have seen over the past six chapters, this would require the reduction of alterity, that is, the reduction of the *tīrtha*. According to Mehta, such reduction appears structurally impossible. Yes, Mehta died far away from his destination. We will all die far away from our destination. Unlike the Hero, Mehta saw and enjoins us to recognize that life is an irreversible movement through which all participants are changed. No one has the final word in the "oncoming, endless future" (HV 261). Our condition is to be always on our way. We are pilgrims.

> Understanding others must culminate in self-understanding, as an acting on oneself but letting the other be, and in that sense of compassion, be an understanding of the other, not in the sense of an intellectual operation performed on him. Understanding then would be a pilgrimage toward oneself, others being the *tīrthas*, the sacred places one passes through on one's way to the final destination.

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# Chapter 7
# Conclusion

Jarava Lal Mehta never reached his destination. He was a *religious* thinker. Though the etymology of "religion" points towards the notion of linking back (*re-ligare*), which initially suggests something akin to regaining a loss, for Mehta and his pilgrim, the linking back of religion points not to the restoration of plenitude, the metaphysical destination for which *Nara* thirsts. Rather, to link back is to accept relationship, and as Heidegger argued, we can only think relationship by first thinking difference. Read in this manner, the linking back of religion would be consonant with Mehta's pilgrimage. The pilgrim embraces his relationship, his separation from plenitude, his incompletion, his mortality.

In the waning years of his life, Mehta frequented the Gaṇeśa temple in Delhi prior to returning to Jabalpur. After laboring through his philosophical and religious thought, perhaps we can now discern Mehta's interest in Gaṇeśa. Gaṇeśa is the "lord of obstacles." Paul B. Courtright explains:

> Gaṇeśa is sometimes called Vighneśa or lord (*īśa*) of obstacles (*vighna*). The word *vighna* is itself a compound made up of the prefix *vi*, meaning "away, asunder," and *ghna*, a term appearing in compound that means "striking with, destroying," from the root *han*, "strike, kill." A *vighna* can be anything that prevents, interrupts, diverts, or impedes anything else. It is any kind of resistance…. By enlisting Gaṇeśa's aid, *the devotee acknowledges the inevitability of obstruction*, *one's own limited powers of control over the destiny of the action*, and the necessity of including the power inherent in the resistance – that is, Vighneśa, the deity residing within the obstacle – as an ally in the undertaking. (1985: 156–157; emphasis added)

If we follow Courtright in this reading, then in reverencing Gaṇeśa, Mehta in effect acknowledged the impending obstructions to his intentions and anticipations. Perhaps in this way, Gaṇeśa is most appropriate for the devotee that is a pilgrim. That is to say, Gaṇeśa is the *iṣṭadevatā* ('chosen deity') for the one who *embraces* his own incompletion.

For some, that is, for heroes, such incompletion is a lack that must be overcome. The thwarted self bemoans its condition. But, and significantly, the hero is philosophical and not religious. Structural separation from plentitude, as shown throughout this project, need not be a threat or a disappointment. Recognition of ontological

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finitude and contingency actually puts the play in play. In this way, religion for the pilgrim is reconciliation to death, that is, living in the face of one's own death. Mehta is not alone. Henry Rosemont Jr. argues that religions reconcile us to the death of our egos, our heroic masks: "We must come to confront directly and accept our mortality, and then go on to live a productive and satisfying life undisturbed by morbid thoughts on the transitory nature of our existence" (2001: 11). Here Rosemont Jr. in effect repeats Mehta's prescription of the pilgrim. Once the illusion of immortality, of the plenitude of being is given up for dead, the ensuing problem would seem to be how to make this loss a gain. This was also Taylor's express purpose at the outset of *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*: "'We must begin *wherever we are* … *Wherever we are*: in a text where we believe ourselves to be.' Wherever we are: Death of God, Disappearance of Self, End of History, Closure of the Book. *Our* problem is how to count all of this not only as loss but as gain." (1984: 17). Separation is a gain in that it is the opening of difference that enables the condition of the *bhakta*. The spacing of difference enables novelty, contingency, and the ecstatic song and dance of the *gopī*.

Genuine cross-cultural encounter and dialogue truly starts with the recognition of the *tīrtha's* inexhaustibility. The other's voice always retains the capacity to exceed the self's intended horizon of meanings. The *tīrtha* interrupts the ontophenomenological gaze. Cross-cultural encounter is thus a religious experience, a pilgrimage. To these ends, the other's texts and traditions are not relegated to the past, but rather continue to speak today, raising issues and concerns perhaps heretofore undetected. The other is neither the self nor the pure non-self. The other is otherwise than self. Pilgrimage involves acceding to the other's distance and separation, and in this way, the pilgrim recognizes his own interminable finitude. Never the master over the contingent fluctuations of time and culture, the pilgrim nurtures a compassion for the other's alterity. Threatened not by that which it knows not, the pilgrim celebrates the open space of novelty that is the chancy future. Pilgrims do not reach their destination. Mehta did not reach his destination. Yet, in making of their lives pilgrimages, pilgrims overcome their lack through reconciliation to their incompletion. Mehta, I submit, was reconciled to his incompletion.

Mehta's Hindu voice continues to speak in the early twenty-first century. We can hear his admonition to give up the historicist dream of isolating the other's thought in the pure past. He challenges us all to reexamine our deep prejudices and to recognize that we never have the whole within sight. Panopticism fails. The best we can do is to join together through an ethico-religious commitment to nurture the alterity of the other and thereby truly win our own homecoming. Linking back is thus remembering our finitude and not our completion, a structural lack that ironically fills up a lack for the pilgrim. Accordingly, classical Indian thought does not die, it is simply forgotten. Mehta's work remembers the Hindu tradition by repeating it and thus introducing it into the midst of the debates concerning religion, postcolonialism, and postmodernism.

Mehta does all of this without recourse to a nostalgic, or chauvinistic, position; he does this without a knee-jerk rejection of the West as well. Mehta was committed neither to the "insider's voice" nor to the "outsider's voice." He precariously,

yet deftly, fell on the fulcrum between India and the West. Mehta embodied postcolonial hermeneutics. Significantly, Sarah Caldwell and Brian K. Smith note that often the subaltern studies scholar will critique "'western' styles of scholarship and argumentation" by means of "western modes of argumentation, theoretical bases, and language." They point to the problem: "There is no serious effort to create a new theoretical position from *within* the South Asian tradition. Perhaps the only way out of this prison house is to start from the ground up using indigenous forms of theory drawn within nonwestern traditions" (2000: 708–709). I propose that Mehta succeeds at just this task. His theory of the *bhakta*, as well as of the pilgrim, significantly repeats South Asian possibilities.[1] Yet, unlike Caldwell and Smith's tacit appeal to a purely Hindu and thus "indigenous" style of thought, Mehta senses the irreducible co-implication of West and East today. Mehta's was a truly cosmopolitan mind; a sober and patient voice well suited for the very concrete work at hand – the imminent arrival of cultural pluralism in the third millennium CE. In this regard, Mehta's life and work anticipates Caldwell and Smith's prescription: "Never before has it been so important to listen to a wide variety of voices and points of view, allowing these to enter into conversation, not just deteriorate into a ghettoized Babel. Good conversation requires empathetic listening. And good debate requires allowing a variety of viewpoints to be heard" (2000: 709). I believe it is symptomatic of the relative unfamiliarity with contemporary Hindu intellectuals that neither Smith nor Caldwell mentions Jarava Lal Mehta in this regard. Indeed, I argue in conclusion that the voice that so clearly speaks "to the conversation we are and the song we hope to become" has gone unsung for far too long.[2] It is my hope that the foregoing may perhaps provide the pitch for the melody we will all eventually sing.

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[1] In the course of this project, I have been repeatedly presented with the question of how South Asian is Mehta's philosophy. In other words, some people have wondered if Mehta is not simply reproducing a Western discourse. If we are to take seriously Heidegger's characterization of the Western tradition (which of course Mehta did), then we are forced to recognize that Mehta is indeed different from the classical Western tradition. Of course, the Western tradition is multifaceted. Nevertheless, I do believe we can sense a recurrent ontotheology that bespeaks ultimate identity. Both the Greek Hero and the Jewish Nomad were tied to issues of presence (recall, the Hero is always present, while the Nomad longs for the messiah *to come*). To this extent, Mehta's recourse to separation not only repeats the forgotten presupposition of the Hindu tradition according to W. Halbfass, but it also clearly contests the Western ontotheological tradition. In this way, Mehta is indeed returning to his roots.

[2] The cited passage was used as a prefatory quote in Mehta (1992).

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